"CARROTS" AND OTHER STORIES

MRS MOLESWORTH'S STORIES for CHILDREN

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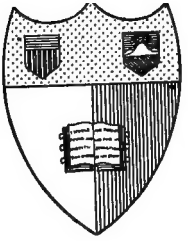

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"CARROTS"

AND OTHER STORIES

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"CARROTS"

JUST A LITTLE BOY

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

AUTHOR OF "CUCKOO CLOCK," "GRANDMOTHER DEAR," "A CHRISTMAS POSY," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER CRANE

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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"CARROTS"

JUST A LITTLE BOY

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH
(ENNIS GRAHAM)
AUTHOR OF "CUCKOO CLOCK," "GRANDMOTHER DEAR," "TELL ME A STORY," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER CRANE

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1910

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TO

Six Little Cousins

MORIER, NOËL, BEVIL, LIONEL, EDWARD,

AND BABY BRIAN

EDINBURGH, 1870

"Is it then a great mistake
That Boys were ever made at all?"

"CARROTS:"

JUST A LITTLE BOY.

CHAPTER I.

FLOSS'S BABY.

"Where did you come from, Baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here?
* * * * * * * *
"But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here!"

G. MACDONALD.

HIS real name was Fabian. But he was never called anything but Carrots. There were six of them. Jack, Cecil, Louise, Maurice, commonly called Mott, Floss, dear, dear Floss, whom he loved best of all, a long way the best of all, and lastly Carrots.

Why Carrots should have come to have his history written I really cannot say. I must leave you, who understand such things a good deal better than I, you, children, for whom the history is written, to find out. I can give you a few reasons why Carrot's history should *not* have been written, but that is about all I can do. There was nothing very remark-

able about him; there was nothing very remarkable about the place where he lived, or the things that he did, and on the whole he was very much like other little boys. There are my *no* reasons for you. But still he was Carrots, and after all, perhaps, that was *the* reason! I shouldn't wonder.

He was the baby of the family; he had every right to be considered the baby, for he was not only the youngest, but very much the youngest; for Floss, who came next to him, was nearly four years older than Carrots. Yet he was never treated as the baby. I doubt if even at the very outset of his little life, when he was just a wee pink ball of a creature, rolled up in flannel, and with his funny curls of red hair standing crisp up all over his head, I doubt, if even then, he was ever called "baby." I feel almost sure it was always "Carrots." He was too independent and sensible to be counted a baby, and he was never fond of being petted — and then, too, "Carrots" came so naturally!

I have said that Carrots loved his sister Floss better than anybody or anything else in the world. I think one reason of this was that she was the very first person he could remember in his life, and a happy thing for him that it was so, for all about her that there was to remember was nice and good and kind. She was four years older than he, four years old, that is to say, when he first came into the world and looked about him with grave inquiry as to what

sort of a place this could be that he had got to. And the first object that his baby-wise eyes settled upon with content, as if in it there might be a possible answer to the riddle, was Floss!

These children's father and mother were not very rich, and having six boys and girls you can quite easily imagine they had plenty to do with their money. Jack was a great boy at school when Carrots first joined the family party, and Cecil and Louise had a governess. Mott learnt with the governess too, but was always talking of the time when he should go to school with Jack, for he was a very boy-ey boy, very much inclined to look down upon girls in general, and his sisters in particular, and his little sister Floss in *particularest*. So, till Carrots appeared on the scene, Floss had had rather a lonely time of it, for, "of course," Cecil and Louise, who had pockets in all their frocks, and could play the "March of the Men of Harlech" as a duet on the piano, were *far* too big to be "friends to Floss," as she called it. They were friendly and kind in an elder sisterly way, but that was quite a different sort of thing from being "friends to her," though it never occurred to Floss to grumble or to think, as so many little people think now-a-days, how much better things would have been arranged if *she* had had the arranging of them.

There was only one thing Floss wished for very, very much, and that was to have a brother or sister,

she did not much care which, younger than herself. She had the most motherly heart in the world, though she was such a quiet little girl that very few people knew anything about what she was thinking, and the big ones laughed at her for being so outrageously fond of dolls. She had dolls of every kind and size, only alike in one thing, that none of them were very pretty, or what you would consider grand dolls. But to Floss they were lovely, only, they were *only* dolls!

Can you fancy, can you in the least fancy, Floss's delight — a sort of delight that made her feel as if she couldn't speak, when one winter's morning she was awakened by nurse to be told that a real live baby had come in the night — a little brother, and "such a funny little fellow," added nurse, "his head just covered with curly red hair. Where did he get that from, I wonder? Not one of my children has hair like that, though yours, Miss Flossie, has a touch of it, perhaps."

Floss looked at her own tangle of fluffy hair with new reverence. "Hair somesing like my hairs," she whispered. "Oh nursie, dear nursie, may Floss see him?"

"Get up and let me dress you quickly, and you shall see him — no fear but that you'll see more of the poor little fellow than you care about," said nurse, though the last words were hardly meant for Floss.

The truth was that though of course every one meant to be kind to this new little baby, to take proper care of him, and all that sort of thing, no one was particularly glad he had come. His father and mother felt that five boys and girls were already a good number to bring up well and educate and start in life, not being very rich you see, and even nurse, who had the very kindest heart in the world, and had taken care of them all, beginning with Jack, ever since they were born, even nurse felt, I think, that they *could* have done without this red-haired little stranger. For nurse was no longer as young as she had been, and as the children's mother could not, she knew, very well afford to keep an under-nurse to help her, it was rather trying to look forward to beginning again with all the "worrit" of a new baby — bad nights and many tiring climbs up the long stairs to the nursery, etc., etc., though nurse was so really good that she did not grumble the least bit, and just quietly made up her mind to make the best of it.

But still Floss was the only person to give the baby a really hearty welcome. And by some strange sort of baby instinct he seemed to know it almost from the first. He screamed at Jack, and no wonder, for Jack, by way of salutation, pinched his poor little nose, and said that the next time they had boiled mutton for dinner, cook need not provide anything but turnips, as there was a fine crop of carrots all

ready, which piece of wit was greatly applauded by Maurice and the girls. He wailed when Cecil and Louise begged to be allowed to hold him in their arms, so that they both tumbled him back on to nurse's lap in a hurry, and called him "a cross, ugly little thing." Only when little Floss sat down on the floor, spreading out her knees with great solemnity, and smoothing her pinafore to make a nice place for baby, and nurse laid him carefully down in the embrace of her tiny arms, "baby" seemed quite content. He gave a sort of wriggle, like a dog when he has been pretending to burrow a hole for himself in the rug, just before he settles down and shuts his eyes, and in half a second was fast asleep.

"Baby loves Floss," said Floss gravely, and as long as nurse would let her, till her arms really ached, there she sat on the floor, as still as a mouse, holding her precious burden.

It was wonderful how trusty she was. And "as handy," said nurse, "indeed far more handy than many a girl of five times her age." "I have been thinking," she said, one day to Floss's mother, "I have been thinking, ma'am, that even if you had been going to keep an under-nurse to help with baby, there would have been nothing for her to do. For the help I get from Miss Flossie is really astonishing, and Master Baby is that fond of her already, you'd hardly believe it."

And Floss's mother kissed her, and told her she

was a good little soul, and Floss felt, oh, so proud! Then a second thought struck her, "Baby dood too, mamma," she said, staring up into her mother's face with her bright searching gray-green eyes.

"Yes," said her mother with a little sigh, "poor baby is good too, dear," and then she had to hurry off to a great overhauling of Jack's shirts, which were, if possible, to be made to last him another half-year at school.

So it came to pass that a great deal of Floss's life was spent in the nursery with Carrots. He was better than twenty dolls, for after a while he actually learnt, first to stand alone, and then to walk, and after a longer while he learnt to talk, and to understand all that Floss said to him, and bye-and-bye to play games with her in his baby way. And how patient Floss was with him! It was no wonder he loved her.

This chapter has seemed almost more about Floss than Carrots you will say, perhaps, but I couldn't tell you anything of Carrots' history without telling you a great deal about Floss too, so I dare say you won't mind. I dare say too you will not care to hear much more about Carrots when he was a baby, for, after all, babies are all very like each other, and a baby that wasn't like others would not *be* a baby! To Floss I fancy he seemed a remarkable baby, but that may have been because he was her very own, and the only baby she had ever

known. He was certainly very good, in so far as he gave nurse exceedingly little trouble, but why children should give trouble when they are perfectly well, and have everything they can possibly want, I have never been able to decide. On the whole, I think it must have something to do with the people who take care of them, as well as with themselves.

Now we will say good-bye to Carrots, as a baby.

CHAPTER II.

SIX YEARS OLD.

"As for me, I love the sea,
The dear old sea!
Don't you?"

SONG.

I THINK I said there was nothing very remarkable about the place where Carrots lived, but considering it over, I am not quite sure that you would agree with me. It was near the sea for one thing, and *that* is always remarkable, is it not? *How* remarkable, how wonderful and changeful the sea is, I doubt if any one can tell who has not really lived by it, not merely visited it for a few weeks in the fine summer time, when it looks so bright and sunny and inviting, but lived by it through autumn and winter too, through days when it looks so dull and leaden, that one can hardly believe it will ever be smiling and playful again, through fierce, rough days, when it lashes itself with fury, and the wind wails as if it were trying to tell the reason.

Carrots' nursery window looked straight out upon the sea, and many and many an hour Floss and he spent at this window, watching their strange fickle neighbour at his gambols. I do not know that they

thought the sea at all wonderful. I think they were too much accustomed to it for that, but they certainly found it very *interesting*. Floss had names for the different kinds of waves; some she called "ribs of beef," when they showed up sideways in layers as it were, of white and brown, and some she called "ponies." That was the kind that came prancing in, with a sort of dance, the white foam curling and rearing, and tossing itself, just exactly like a frisky pony's mane. Those were the prettiest waves of all, I think.

It was not at all a dangerous coast, where the Cove House, that was Carrots' home, stood. It was not what is called "picturesque." It was a long flat stretch of sandy shore, going on and on for miles just the same. There were very few trees and no mountains, not even hills.

In summer, a few, just a very few visitors used to come to Sandyshore for bathing; they were always visitors with children, for every one said it was such a nice safe place for the little people.

But, safe as it was, it wasn't till Carrots was growing quite a big boy, nearly six, I should think, that Floss and he got leave to go out and play on the shore by themselves, the thing they had been longing for ever since they could remember.

This was how they did get leave at last. Nurse was very, very busy, one day; really quite extra busy, for she was arranging and helping to pack

Jack's things to go to a new school. Jack was so big now, about sixteen, that he was going to a kind of college, or grown-up school, the last he would go to, before entering the army. And there was quite a fuss in the house. Jack thought himself almost as grand as if he was an officer already, and Mott was overpowered with envy. Everybody was fussing about Jack, and no one had much time to think of the two little ones.

They stood at the nursery window, poor little souls, when Floss came up from her lessons, gazing out wistfully. It was a nice spring day, not exactly sunny, but looking as if the sun were only hiding himself to tease you, and might come out any minute.

"If we *might* go down to the shore," said Floss, half to herself, half to Carrots, and half to nurse. I shouldn't have said it so, for there can't be three halves of anything, but no doubt you will understand.

"Go down to the shore, my dear?" repeated nurse, "I wish you could, I'm sure, but it will be afternoon, at least, before I have a minute to spare to take you. And there's no one else to-day, for cook and Esther are both as busy as busy. Perhaps Miss Cecil and Miss Louise will take you when they have done their lessons."

"We don't care to go with them, much," said Floss, "they don't understand our plays. We like

best to go with you, nursie, and you to sit down with your sewing near — that's the nicest way. Oh, nurse," she exclaimed with sudden eagerness, "wouldn't you let us go alone? You can peep out of the window and see us every few minutes, and we'll be so good."

Nurse looked out of the window doubtfully.

"Couldn't you play in the garden at the back, instead?" she said. "Your papa and mamma won't be home till late, and I am always in a terror of any harm happening while they are away."

"We won't let any harm happen," said Floss, "and we are *so* tired of the garden, nurse. There is nothing to play at there. The little waves are so pretty this morning."

There was certainly very little to play at in the green, at the back of the house, which was called the garden. Being so near the sea, the soil was so poor, that hardly any flowers would grow, and even the grass was coarse and lumpy. Then there were no trees, and what is a garden without trees?

Nurse looked out of the window again.

"Well," she said, "if you will really be very good, I think I might trust you. Now, Master Carrots, you will promise to do exactly what Miss Floss tells you?"

"Yes, I promise," said Carrots, who had been listening with great anxiety, though he had not hitherto spoken — he was not a great talker — "I

promise, nurse. I will do exactly what Floss tells me, and Floss will do exactly what I tell her, won't you, Floss? So we shall both be *kite* good, that way, won't we?"

"Very well," said nurse gravely, though she felt very much inclined to laugh, "then run and get your things as fast as you can."

And, oh, how happy the two were when they found themselves out on the shore all alone! They were so happy, they did not know what to do; so first of all, they ran races to run away a little of the happiness. And when they had run themselves quite hot, they sat down on a little heap of stones to consider what they should do next. They had no spades with them, for they did not care very much about digging; children who live always by the sea never care so much about digging as the little visitors who come down in the summer, and whose very first idea at the sight of the sea is "spades and buckets."

"What shall we play at, Carrots?" said Floss, "I wish it was warm enough to paddle."

Carrots looked at the little soft rippling waves, contemplatively.

"When I'm a man," he said, "I shall paddle *always*. I shall paddle in winter too. When I'm a man I won't have no nurse."

"Carrots," said Floss, reproachfully, "that isn't good of you. Think how kind nurse is."

"Well, then," replied Carrots, slowly, "I *will* have her, but she must let me paddle always, when I'm a man."

"When you are a man, Carrots," said Floss, solemnly still, "I hope you will have something better to do than paddling. Perhaps you'll be a soldier, like Jack."

"Killing people isn't better than paddling," retorted Carrots. "I'd rather be a sailor, like papa."

"Sailors have to kill people, too, sometimes," said Floss.

"*Have* they?" said Carrots. Then he sat silent for a few minutes, finding this new idea rather overwhelming. "Naughty people, do you mean, Floss?" he inquired at last.

"Yes," said Floss, unhesitatingly, "naughty people, of course."

"But I don't like killing," said Carrots, "not killing naughty people, I don't like. I won't be a soldier, and I won't be a sailor, and I won't be a butcher, 'cos butchers kill lambs. Perhaps I'll be a fisherman."

"But fishermen kill fish," said Floss.

"Do they?" said Carrots, looking up in her face pathetically with his gentle brown eyes. "I'm so sorry. I don't understand about killing, Floss. I don't like it."

"I don't either," said Floss; "but perhaps it has to be. If there was no killing we'd have nothing to eat."

"Eggs," said Carrots; "eggs and potatoes, and — and — cake?"

"But even that would be a *sort* of killing," persisted Floss, though feeling by no means sure that she was not getting beyond her depth, "if we didn't eat eggs they would grow into chickens, and so eating stops them; and potatoes have roots, and when they're pulled up they don't grow; and cake has eggs in, and — oh I don't know, let's talk of something else."

"What?" said Carrots, "Fairies?"

"If you like, or supposing we talk about when auntie comes and brings 'Sybil.'"

"Yes," said Carrots, "I like that best."

"Well, then," began Floss, "supposing it is late in the evening when they come. *You* would be in bed, Carrots, dear, but I would have begged to sit up a little longer and —"

"No, Floss, that isn't nice. I won't talk about Sybil, if you make it like that," interrupted Carrots, his voice sounding as if he were going to cry. "Sybil isn't not any bigger than me. I wouldn't be in bed, Floss."

"Very well, dear. Never mind darling. I won't make it like that. It was very stupid of me. No, Sybil and auntie will come just about our tea-time, and we shall be peeping along the road to see if the carriage from the station is coming, and when we hear it we'll run in, and perhaps mamma will say we

may stay in the drawing-room to see them. You will have one of your new sailor suits on, Carrots, and I shall have my white piqué and blue sash, and nurse will have made the nursery tea-table look so nice — with a clean table-cloth, you know, and quite thin bread and butter, and jam, and, perhaps, eggs."

"I won't eat one," interrupted Carrots; "I won't never eat eggs. I'll keep all mine that I get to eat, in a box, till they've growed into chickens."

"But they're boiled when you get them," said Floss; "they wouldn't grow into chickens when they're boiled."

Carrots sighed. "Well, never mind," he said, "go on, Floss."

"Well, then," started Floss again, "you see the nursery tea would look so nice that Sybil would be *sure* to ask her mamma to let her have tea with us, even though it was the first evening. Perhaps, you know, she would be rather *shy*, just at first, till she got to know us. So we would be very, very kind to her, and after tea we would show her all our things — the dolls, only — Carrots, I'm afraid the dolls are getting rather old."

"Are they?" said Carrots, sympathisingly. "When I'm a man I'll buy you such a *lot* of new dolls, Floss, and Sybil, too, if she likes dolls — does she, Floss?"

"I don't know. I should think so," said Floss. "When papa and mamma went to see auntie, they said Sybil was like a doll herself. I suppose she has

beautiful blue eyes and long gold curls. That was a year ago; she must be bigger now. Carrots."

"What?"

"We must get up and run about a little now. It's too cold to sit still so long, and if we get cold, nurse won't let us come out alone again."

Up jumped Carrots on to his sturdy little legs. "I'll run, Floss," he said.

"Floss," he began, when they stopped to take breath again, "once I saw a little boy with a hoop. It went so nice on the sands. I wish I had a hoop, Floss."

"I wish you had, dear," said Floss. "I'd buy you one, if I had any money. But I haven't, and we couldn't ask mamma, because I know," and Floss shook her head mysteriously, "I know poor mamma *hasn't any money to spare.* I must think of a plan to get some."

Carrots kept silence for about three-quarters of a minute. "Have you thinkened, Floss?" he asked, eagerly.

"Thought," gravely said Floss, "not thinkened, what about?"

"About a plan," replied Carrots. He called it "a pan," but Floss understood him.

"Oh, dear, no," said Floss, "not yet. Plans take a great lot of thinking. They're real things, you see, Carrots, not like fancies about fairies and Sybil coming."

"But when Sybil does come, that'll be real then," said Carrots.

"Of course," agreed Floss, "but fancying about it before, isn't real."

It took Carrots a little while to get this into his head. Then he began again.

"When will you have thinkened enough, Floss? By tea-time?"

"I don't know. No, I think you had better wait till to-morrow morning, and then perhaps the plan will be ready."

"Very well," said Carrots, adding, with a little sigh, "to-morrow morning is a long time, Floss."

"Not very," said Floss, consolingly. "Now Carrots, let's have one more race, and then we must go in."

CHAPTER III.

PLANS.

"'Have you invented a plan for it?' Alice inquired,
'Not yet,' said the knight."

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS.

THE next morning Carrots woke very early, and the first thing he thought of was the plan. Floss and he slept in the night nursery, in two little beds, and nurse slept in a small room that had a door opening into the nursery. She used to sleep there herself, but now that Carrots was so big, Floss and he were quite safe by themselves, and poor old nurse enjoyed having her own little room.

Floss was still asleep, so Carrots only climbed out of his own cot into hers, and crouched himself down at the foot, watching for her to wake. Floss looked very nice asleep; her "fuzzy" hair was tumbling over the pillow, and her cheeks looked pinker than when she was awake.

"I wonder what being asleep is," thought the little boy as he looked at her. "I always go away, such a long way, when I am asleep. I wonder if Floss does."

She couldn't have been very far away just then, for somehow, though Carrots sat so still, she seemed to know he was there. She turned round and half

opened her eyes, then shut them as if she were trying to go to sleep again, then opened them once more, quite wide this time, and caught sight of the funny little figure beside her.

"Carrots," she said, in a sleepy voice, "Carrots, dear, what are you doing there? You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. May I come in 'aside you, Floss? I was only watching for you to wake; I didn't wake you, did I?" said Carrots, as Floss made room for him, and he poked his cold little toes down into a nice warm place, "I did so want to know if it was ready, for it's to-morrow morning now."

"If what's ready?" said Floss, for she was rather sleepy still.

"The plan for getting money."

"Oh!" said Floss. "Yes," she went on after thinking for a minute, "yes, it's nearly ready; at least I'm almost sure it is. But it's not quite ready for telling *you*, yet, Carrots."

Carrots looked terribly disappointed.

"I think," went on Floss, "I think it will be ready for telling you after breakfast. And if you like, you may listen to something I am going to ask nurse at breakfast, and, perhaps, that will help you to guess what the plan is."

At breakfast time Carrots was all ears. All ears and no tongue, so that nurse began to wonder if he was ill.

"I shouldn't like you to be ill the very day after

Master Jack has gone," she said anxiously (Jack had gone up to town by the night train with his father), "one trouble at a time is quite enough for your poor mamma."

"Is Jack's going to the big school a trouble?" asked Floss, opening her eyes very wide, "I thought they were all very glad."

"My dear," said nurse solemnly, "one may be glad of a thing and sorry too. And changes mostly are good and bad together."

Floss did not say any more, but she seemed to be thinking about what nurse had said. Carrots was thinking too.

"When I'm a man," he said at last, "I won't go to a big school if Floss doesn't want me to."

Nurse smiled. "There's time enough to see about that," she said, "get on with your breakfast, Master Carrots; you'll never grow a big boy if you don't eat plenty."

"Nurse," said Floss, suddenly, "what's the dearest thing we eat? what costs most?"

"Meat, now-a-days, Miss Flossie," said nurse.

"Could we do without it?" asked Floss. Nurse shook her head.

"What could we do without?" continued the child. "We couldn't do without bread or milk, I suppose. What could we do without that costs money?"

"Most things do that," said nurse, who began to

have a glimmering of what Floss was driving at, "but the money's well spent in good food to make you strong and well."

"Then isn't there anything we could do without —without it hurting us, I mean?" said Floss, in a tone of disappointment.

"Oh yes," said nurse, "I dare say there is. Once a little boy and girl I knew went without sugar in their tea for a month, and their grandmother gave them sixpence each instead."

"Sixpence!" exclaimed Floss, her eyes gleaming.

"Sixpence each," corrected nurse.

"Two sixpences, that would be a shilling. Carrots, do you hear?"

Carrots had been listening with might and main, but was rather puzzled.

"Would two sixpennies pay for two hoops?" he whispered to Floss, pulling her pinafore till she bent her head down to listen.

"Of course they would. At least I'm almost sure. I'll ask nurse. Nurse dear," she went on in a louder voice, "do you think we might do that way—Carrots and I—about sugar, I mean?"

"I don't see that it would do you any harm," said nurse. "You must ask your mamma."

But Floss hesitated.

"I shouldn't much like to ask mamma," she said, and Carrots, who was listening so intently that he had forgotten all about his bread and milk, noticed

that Floss's face grew red. "I shouldn't much like to ask mamma, because, nursie, dear, it is only that we want to get money for something for ourselves, and if we told mamma, it would be like asking her to *give* us the money. It wouldn't be any harm for us not to eat any sugar in our tea for a month, and you could keep the sugar in a packet all together, nurse, and *then* you might tell mamma that we had saved it, and she would give us a shilling for it. It would be quite worth a shilling, wouldn't it, nurse?"

"Oh, yes," said nurse, "I am sure your mamma would say it was." Then she considered a little. She was one of those truly trustworthy nurses whose notions are strong on the point of everything being told to "mamma." But she perfectly understood Floss's hesitation, and though she might not have been able to put her feeling into words, she felt that it might do the child harm to thwart her delicate instinct.

"Well, nurse?" said Floss, at last.

"Well, Miss Flossie, I don't think for once I shall be doing wrong in letting you have a secret. When will you begin? This is Thursday; on Saturday your mamma will give me the week's sugar — suppose you begin on Sunday? But does Master Carrots quite understand?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss, confidently, "he understands, don't you, dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Carrots, "we won't eat not any

sugar, Floss and me, for a great long time, and nurse will tie it up in a parcel with a string round, and mamma will buy it and give us a great lot of pennies, and then, and then" — he began to jump about with delight — "Floss and me will go to the toy-shop and buy our hoops, won't we, Floss? Oh I wish it was time to go now, don't you, Floss?"

"Yes, dear, a month's a good while to wait," said Floss sympathisingly. "May we go out on the shore again by ourselves this afternoon, nurse?"

"If it doesn't rain," said nurse; and Floss, who had half an hour to wait before it was time for her to join her sisters in the schoolroom, went to the window to have a look at the weather. She had not stood there for more than a minute when Carrots climbed up on to a chair beside her.

"It's going to rain, Floss," he said, "there are the little curly clouds in the sky that Matthew says come when it rains."

Floss looked up at the sky and down at the sea.

"The sea looks cross to-day," she said.

There were no pretty ripples this morning; the water looked dull and leaden.

"Floss," said Carrots, with a sigh, "I do get *so* tired when you are at lessons all the morning and I have *nucken* to do. Can't you think of a plan for me to have something to do?" Carrots' head was running on "plans."

Floss considered.

"Would you like to tidy my drawer for me?" she said. "This isn't the regular day for tidying it, but it is in a mess, because I turned all the things upside down when I was looking for our race horses' reins yesterday. Will you put it *quite* tidy, Carrots?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*, dear Floss," said Carrots, "I'll put all the dolls neat, and all the pieces, and all the sewing things. Oh, dear Floss, what nice plans you make."

So when Floss had gone to her lessons, and nurse was busy with her morning duties, in and out of the room, so as not to lose sight of Carrots, but still too busy to amuse him, he, with great delight, set to work at the drawer. It certainly was much in need of "tidying," and after trying several ways, Carrots found that the best plan was to take everything out, and then put the different things back again in order. It took him a good while, and his face got rather red with stooping down to the floor to pick up all the things he had deposited there, for the drawer itself was too heavy for him to lift out bodily, if, indeed, such an idea had occurred to him. It was the middle drawer of the cupboard, the top part of which was divided into shelves where the nursery cups and saucers and those sort of things stood. The drawer above Floss's was nurse's, where she kept her work, and a few books, and a little note-paper and so on; and the drawer at the bottom, so that he could easily reach it, was Carrots' own.

One end of Floss's drawer was given up to her dolls. She still had a good many, for though she did not care for them now as much as she used, she never could be persuaded to throw any of them away. But they were not very pretty; even Carrots could see that, and Carrots, to tell the truth, was very fond of dolls.

"If I had some money," he said to himself, "I would buy Floss such a most beautiful doll. I wish I had some money."

For the moment he forgot about the hoops and the "plan" and sat down on a little stool with one of the unhappiest looking of the dolls in his arms.

"I wish I could buy you a new face, poor dolly," he said. "I wish I had some money."

He got up again to put poor dolly back into her corner. As he was smoothing down the paper which lined the drawer, he felt something hard close to dolly's foot; he pushed away the dolls to see — there, almost hidden by a crumple in the paper lay a tiny little piece of money — a little shining piece, about the size of a sixpence, only a different colour.

"A yellow sixpenny, oh, how nice!" thought Carrots, as he seized it. "I wonder if Floss knowed it was there. It would just do to buy a new doll. I *wish* I could go to the toy-shop to buy one to surprise Floss. I won't tell Floss I've found it. I'll keep it for a secret, and some day I'll buy Floss

"A Yellow Sixpenny, oh, how Nice!" — p. 26.

a new doll. I'm sure Floss doesn't know — I think the fairies must have put it there."

He wrapped the piece of money up carefully in a bit of paper, and after considering where he could best hide it, so that Floss should not know till it was time to surprise her, he fixed on a beautiful place — he hid it under one of the little round saucers in his paint-box — a very old paint-box it was, which had descended from Jack, first to Mott and then to Carrots, but which, all the same, Carrots considered one of his greatest treasures.

When nurse came into the room, she found the tidying of the drawer completed, and Carrots sitting quietly by the window. He did not tell her about the money he had found, it never entered into his little head that he should speak of it. He had got into the way of not telling all the little things that happened to him to any one but Floss, for he was naturally a very quiet child, and nurse was getting too old to care about all the tiny interests of her children as she once had done. Besides, he had determined to keep it a secret, even from Floss, till he could buy a new doll with it — but very likely he would have told her of it after all, had not something else put it out of his head.

The something else was that that afternoon nurse took Floss and him a long walk, and a walk they were very fond of.

It was to the cottage of the old woman, who, ever

since they had come to Sandyshore, had washed for them. She was a very nice old woman, and her cottage was beautifully clean, and now and then Floss and Carrots had gone with nurse to have tea with her, which was a great treat. But to-day they were not going to tea; they were only going because nurse had to pay Mrs. White some money for washing up Jack's things quickly, and nurse knew the old woman would be glad to have it, as it was close to the day on which she had to pay her rent.

Floss and Carrots were delighted to go, for even when they did not stay to tea, Mrs. White always gave them a glass of milk, and, generally, a piece of home-made cake.

Before they started, nurse went to her drawer and took out of it a very small packet done up in white paper, and this little packet she put into her purse.

It was, after all, a nice fine day. Floss and Carrots walked quietly beside nurse for a little, and then she gave them leave to run races, which made the way seem very short, till they got to Mrs. White's.

"How nice it will be when we have our hoops, won't it, Carrots?" said Floss.

Carrots had almost forgotten about the hoops, but now that Floss mentioned them, it put him in mind of something else.

"Wouldn't you like a new doll, Floss?" he said

mysteriously, "a most beautifullest new doll, with hair like — like the angels' hairs in the big window at church, and eyes like the little blue stones in mamma's ring?"

"Of course I would," said Floss, "and we'd call her Angelina, wouldn't we, Carrots? But it's no good thinking about it — I shall never have one like that, unless the fairies send it me!"

"If the fairies sended you money to buy one, wouldn't that do?" said Carrots, staring up in her face with a funny look in his eyes.

But before Floss had time to answer, nurse called to them — they were at the corner of the lane which led to Mrs. White's.

Mrs. White was very kind. She had baked a cake only a day or two before, and cut off a beautiful big piece for each of the children, then she gave them a drink of milk, and they ran out into her little garden to eat their cake and look at the flowers, till nurse had finished her business with the old washerwoman, and was ready to go home.

Floss and Carrots thought a great deal of Mrs. White's garden. Small as it was, it had far more flowers in it than their own garden at the back of the Cove House, for it was a mile or two farther from the sea, and the soil was richer, and it was more sheltered from the wind.

In summer there was what Floss called quite a "buzzy" sound in this little garden — she meant

that sweet, lazy-busy hum of bees and butterflies and all sorts of living creatures, that you never hear except in a real old-fashioned garden where there are lots of clove pinks and sweet williams and roses, roses especially, great, big cabbage roses, and dear little pink climbing roses, the kind that peep in at a cottage window to bid you "good-morning." Oh, how very sweet those old-fashioned flowers are — though "rose fanciers" and all the clever gardeners we have now-a-days wouldn't give anything for them! *I* think them the sweetest of all. Don't you, children? Or is it only when one begins to grow old-fashioned oneself and to care more for things that used to be than things that are now, that one gets to prize these old friends so?

I am wandering away from Floss and Carrots waiting for nurse in the cottage garden; you must forgive me, boys and girls — when people begin to grow old they get in the habit of telling stories in a rambling way, but I don't find children so hard upon this tiresome habit as big people sometimes are. And it all comes back to me so — even the old washerwoman's cottage I can see so plainly, and the dear straggly little garden!

For you see, children, I am telling you the history of a *real* little boy and girl, not fancy children, and that is why, though there is nothing very wonderful about Floss and Carrots, I hope the story of their

little pleasures and sorrows and simple lives may be interesting to you.

But I must finish about the visit to the washer-woman in another chapter. I have made this one rather too long already.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOST HALF-SOVEREIGN.

"Children should not leave about
Anything that's small and bright;
Lest the fairies spy it out,
And fly off with it at night."

POEMS WRITTEN FOR A CHILD.

THERE was no buzzy sound in Mrs. White's garden this afternoon. It was far too early in the year for that, indeed it was beginning to feel quite chilly and cold, as the afternoons often do of fine days in early spring, and by the time Floss and Carrots had eaten their cake, and examined all the rose bushes to see if they could find any buds, and wished it were summer, so that there would be some strawberries hiding under the glossy green leaves, they began to wonder why nurse was so long — and to feel rather cold and tired of waiting.

"Just run to the door, Carrots, dear," said Floss, "and peep in to see if nurse is coming."

She did not like to go herself, for she knew that nurse and Mrs. White were fond of a comfortable talk together and might not like to be interrupted by her. But Carrots they would not mind.

Carrots set off obediently, but before he got to the

door he met nurse coming out. She was followed by Mrs. White and both were talking rather earnestly.

"You'll let me know, if so be as you find it, Mrs. Hooper; you won't forget?"—Mrs. White was saying—Hooper was nurse's name—"for I feel quite oneasy—I do that, for you."

"I'll let you know, and thank you, Mrs. White," said nurse. "I'm glad I happened to bring some of my own money with me too, for I should have been sorry to put you to any ill-convenience by my carelessness—though how I could have been so careless as to mislay it, I'm sure it's more than I can say."

"It is, indeed, and you so careful," said Mrs. White sympathisingly.

Just then nurse caught sight of Carrots.

"Come along, Master Carrots," she said, "I was just going to look for you. Wherever's Miss Floss? We must be quick; it's quite time we were home."

"I'll tell Floss," said Carrots, disappearing again down the path, and in another moment Floss and he ran back to nurse.

Though they had been very quick, nurse seemed to think they had been slow. She even scolded Floss a very little as if she had been kept waiting by her and Carrots, when she was in a hurry to go, and both Floss and Carrots felt that this was very hard when the fact was that they had been waiting for nurse till they were both tired and cold.

"It wasn't Floss's fault. Floss wanted *you* to

come quick, and she sended me to see," said Carrots indignantly.

"Hold your tongue, Master Carrots," said nurse sharply.

Carrots' face got very red, he gave nurse one reproachful look, but did not speak. He took Floss's hand and pulled her on in front. But Floss would not go; she drew her hand away.

"No, Carrots, dear," she said in a low voice, "it wouldn't be kind to leave nurse all alone when she is sorry about something."

"Is she sorry about somesing?" said Carrots.

"Yes," replied Floss, "I am sure she is. You run on for a minute. I want to speak to nurse."

Carrots ran on and Floss stayed behind.

"Nurse," she said softly, slipping her hand through nurse's arm, which, by stretching up on tip-toe, she was just able to do, "nurse, dear, what's the matter?"

"Nothing much, Miss Flossie," replied nurse, patting the kind little hand, "nothing much, but I'm growing an old woman and easy put out — and such a stupid like thing for me to have done!"

"What have you done? What is stupid?" inquired Floss, growing curious as well as sympathising.

"I have lost a half-sovereign — a ten-shilling piece in gold, Miss Flossie," replied nurse.

"Out of your pocket — dropped it, do you mean?" said Floss.

"Oh no — I had it in my purse — at least I thought

I had," said nurse. "It was a half-sovereign of your mamma's that she gave me to pay Mrs. White with for Master Jack's things and part of last week that was left over, and I wrapped it up with a shilling and a sixpence — it came to eleven and six, altogether — in a piece of paper, and put it in my drawer in the nursery, and before I came out I put the packet in my purse. And when I opened it at Mrs. White's no half-sovereign was there! Only the shilling and the sixpence!"

"You didn't drop it at Mrs. White's, did you? Should we go back and look?" said Floss, standing still, as if ready to run off that moment.

"No, no, my dear. It's not at Mrs. White's. She and I searched all over, and she's as honest a body as could be," replied nurse. "No, there's just the chance of its being in the drawer at home. I feel all in a fever till I get there to look. But don't you say anything about it, Miss Flossie; it's my own fault, and no one must be troubled about it but myself."

"Poor nursie," said Floss, "I'm so sorry. But you're sure to find it in your drawer. Let's go home very fast. Carrots," she called out to the little figure obediently trotting on in front, "Carrots, come and walk with nursie and me now. Nurse isn't vexed."

Carrots turned back, looking up wistfully in nurse's face.

"Poor darlings," said the old woman to herself, "such a shame of me to have spoilt their walk!"

And all the way home, "to make up," she was even kinder than usual.

But her hopes of finding the lost piece of money were disappointed. She searched all through the drawer in vain; there was no half-sovereign to be seen. Suddenly it struck her that Carrots had been busy "tidying" for Floss that morning.

"Master Carrots, my dear," she said, "when you were busy at Miss Floss's drawer to-day, you didn't open mine, did you, and touch anything in it?"

"Oh, no," said Carrots, at once, "I'm quite, quite *sure* I didn't, nursie."

"You're sure you didn't touch nurse's purse, or a little tiny packet of white paper, in her drawer?" inquired Floss, with an instinct that the circumstantial details might possibly recall some forgotten remembrance to his mind.

"*Quite* sure," said Carrots, looking straight up in their faces with a thoughtful, but not uncertain expression in his brown eyes.

"Because nurse has lost something out of her drawer, you see, Carrots dear, and she is very sorry about it," continued Floss.

"What has she lost? But I'm *sure*," repeated Carrots, "I didn't touch nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it. What has nurse lost?"

"A half-sovereign —" began Floss, but nurse interrupted her.

"Don't tease him any more about it," she said; "it's plain he doesn't know, and I wouldn't like the other servants to hear. Just forget about it, Master Carrots, my dear, perhaps nurse will find it some day."

So Carrots, literally obedient, asked no more questions. He only said to himself, with a puzzled look on his face, "A half-sovereign! I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns — I thought only Floss had — and I never saw any broken in halfs!"

But as no more was said in his hearing about the matter, it passed from his innocent mind.

Nurse thought it right to tell the children's mother of her loss, and the girls and Maurice heard of it too. They all were very sorry for nurse, for she took her own carelessness rather sorely to heart. But by her wish, nothing was said of it to the two other servants, one of whom had only lately come, though the other had been with them many years.

"I'd rather by far bear the loss," said nurse, "than cause any ill-feeling about it, ma'am."

And her mistress gave in to her. "Though certainly *you* must not bear the loss, nurse," she said, kindly; "for in all these years you have saved me too many half-sovereigns and whole ones too for me to mind much about the loss of one. And you've asked Carrots, you say; you're sure he knows nothing about it?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," said nurse, unhesitatingly.

And several days went on, and nothing more was said or heard about the half-sovereign. Only all this time the little yellow sixpenny lay safely hidden away in Carrots' paint-box.

In a sense he had forgotten about it. He knew it was safe there, and he had almost fixed in his mind not to tell Floss about it till the day they should be going to the toy-shop to buy their hoops. Once or twice he had been on the point of showing it to her, but had stopped short, thinking how much more delightful it would be to "surprise" her. He had quite left off puzzling his head as to where the little coin had come from; he had found it in Floss's drawer, that was quite enough. If he had any thoughts about its history, they were that either Floss had had "the sixpenny" a long time ago and had forgotten it, or that the fairies had brought it; and on the whole he inclined to the latter explanation, for you see there was something different about this sixpenny to any he had ever seen before.

Very likely "fairies' sixpennies" are always that pretty yellow colour, he thought.

One day, about a week after the loss of the half-sovereign, Maurice happened to come into the nursery just at the little ones' tea-time. It was a half-holiday, and he had been out a long walk with some of his companions, for he still went to school at Sandyshore, and now he had come in tremendously hungry and thirsty.

"I say, nurse," he exclaimed, seating himself unceremoniously at the table, "I'm awfully hungry, and mamma's out, and we shan't have tea for two hours yet. And Carrots, young man, I want your paint-box; mine's all gone to smash, and Cecil won't lend me hers, and I want to paint flags with stars and stripes for my new boat."

"Tars and tipes," repeated Carrots, "what's tars and tipes?"

"What's that to you?" replied Mott, politely. "Bless me, I am so thirsty. Give me your tea, Carrots, and nurse will make you some more. What awful weak stuff! But I'm too thirsty to wait."

He seized Carrots' mug and drank off its contents at one draught. But when he put the mug down he made a *very* wry face.

"What horrible stuff!" he exclaimed. "Nurse, you've forgotten to put in any sugar."

"No, she hasn't," said Carrots, bluntly.

Nurse smiled, but said nothing, and Floss looked fidgety.

"What do you mean?" said Mott. "Don't you like sugar — eh, young 'un?"

"Yes, I do like it," replied Carrots, but he would say no more.

Floss grew more and more uneasy.

"Oh, Mott," she burst out, "please don't tease Carrots. It's nothing wrong; it's only something we've planned ourselves."

Mott's curiosity was by this time thoroughly aroused.

"A secret, is it?" he exclaimed, pricking up his ears; "you'd best tell it me. I'm a duffer at keeping secrets. Out with it."

Floss looked ready to cry, and Carrots shut his mouth tight, as if determined not to give in. Nurse thought it time to interfere.

"Master Maurice," she said, appealingly, "don't tease the poor little things, there's a good boy. If it is a secret, there's no harm in it, you may be sure."

"Tease!" repeated Mott, virtuously, "I'm not teasing. I only want to know what the mystery is — why shouldn't I? I won't interfere."

Now Mott was just at the age when the spirit of mischief is most apt to get thorough hold of a boy; and once this *is* the case, who can say where or at what a boy will stop? Every opposition or contradiction only adds fuel to the flames, and not seldom a tiny spark may thus end in a great fire. Nurse knew something of boys in general, and of Mott in particular; and knowing what she did, she decided in her own mind that she had better take the bull by the horns without delay.

"Miss Floss," she said seriously, "and Master Carrots, I think you had better tell your brother your secret. He'll be very kind about it, you'll see, and he won't tell anybody."

"Won't you, Mott?" said Floss, jumping up and down on her chair in her anxiety. "Promise."

"Honour bright," said Mott.

Carrots opened his mouth as if about to speak, but shut it down again.

"What were *you* going to say?" said Mott.

"Nucken," replied Carrots.

"People don't open their mouths like that, if they've 'nucken' to say," said Mott, as if he didn't believe Carrots.

"I didn't mean that I wasn't *going* to say nucken," said Carrots, "I mean I haven't nucken to say now."

"And what were you going to say?" persisted Mott.

Carrots looked frightened.

"I was only sinking if you knowed, and nurse knowed, and Floss knowed, and I knowed, it wouldn't be a secret."

Mott burst out laughing.

"What a precious goose you are," he exclaimed. "Well, secret or no secret, I'm going to hear it; so tell me."

Floss looked at nurse despairingly.

"You tell, nurse, please," she said.

So nurse told, and Maurice looked more amused than ever. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe Carrots'll hold out for a month, whatever Floss may do, unless he has a precious lump of ac — ac — what is it the head people call it? —

acquisitiveness for his age. But you needn't have made such a fuss about your precious secret. Here, nurse, give us some tea, and you may put in all the sugar Floss and Carrots have saved by now."

Floss and Carrots looked ready to cry, but nurse reassured them.

"Never you fear," she said; "he shall have what's proper, but no more. Never was such a boy for sweet things as you, Master Mott."

"It shows in my temper, doesn't it?" he said saucily. And then he was so pleased with his own wit that for a few minutes he forgot to tease, occupying himself by eating lots of bread and butter instead, so that tea went on peaceably.

CHAPTER V.

CARROTS IN TROUBLE.

"But bitter while they flow, are childish tears."

"Now Carrots," said Mott, when he had eaten what he considered might possibly support him for the next two hours, "now Carrots, let's have the paint-box. You needn't disturb yourself," he continued, for Carrots was preparing to descend from his high chair, "I know where you keep it; it's in your drawer, isn't it? Which is his drawer, nurse? It'll be a good opportunity for me to see if he keeps it tidy."

"No, no, let me get it myself," cried Carrots, tumbling himself off his chair anyhow in his eagerness. "Nurse, nurse, don't tell him which is mine; don't let him take my paint-box, let me get it my own self."

Nurse looked at him with some surprise; it was seldom the little boy so excited himself.

"Master Mott won't hurt your drawer, my dear," she said; "you don't mind his having your paint-box, I'm sure. But do let him get it out himself, if he wants, Master Maurice, there's a dear boy," she

continued, for Maurice was by this time ferreting in Floss's drawer with great gusto, and in another moment would have been at Carrots'! But Carrots was at it before him. He pulled it open as far as he could, for in consequence of Mott's investigations in the upper story, he could not easily penetrate to his own quarters. But he knew exactly where the paint-box lay, and managed to slip it out, without Maurice's noticing what he was doing. His triumph was short-lived, however; before he could open the box, Mott was after him.

"Hi, you young sneak!" he cried, "what are you after now? Give me the box; I believe you want to take the best paints out before you lend it to me," and he wrenched the paint-box out of his little brother's hands.

"I don't, I don't," sobbed Carrots, sitting down on the floor and crying bitterly; "you may have all the paints, Mott, but it's my secret, oh, my secret!"

"What are you talking about?" said Mott, roughly, pulling out the lid as he spoke. The box had been all tumbled about in the struggle, and the paints came rattling out, the paints and the brushes, and the little saucers, and with them came rolling down on to the floor, children, you know what — the "fairies' sixpenny," the little bright shining yellow half-sovereign!

A strange change came over Mott's face.

"Nurse," he cried, "do you see that? What does that mean?"

Nurse hastened up to where he was standing; she stared for a moment in puzzled astonishment at the spot on the carpet to which the toe of Maurice's boot was pointing, then she stooped down slowly and picked up the coin, still without speaking.

"Well, nurse," said Maurice, impatiently, "what do you think of that?"

"My half-sovereign," said nurse, as if hardly believing what she saw.

"Of course it's your half-sovereign," said Mott, "it's as plain as a pike-staff. But how did it come there, that's the question?"

Nurse looked at Carrots with puzzled perplexity. "He couldn't have known," she said in a low voice, too low for Carrots to hear. He was still sitting on the floor sobbing, and through his sobs was to be heard now and then the melancholy cry, "My secret, oh, my poor secret."

"You hear what he says," said Maurice; "what does his 'secret' mean but that he sneaked into your drawer and took the half-sovereign, and now doesn't like being found out. I'm ashamed to have him for my brother, that I am, the little cad!"

"But he couldn't have understood," said nurse, at a loss how otherwise to defend her little boy. "I'm not even sure that he rightly knew of my losing it, and he might have taken it, meaning no harm, not knowing what it was, indeed, very likely."

"Rubbish," said Maurice. "A child that is going

without sugar to get money instead, must be old enough to understand something about what money is."

"But that was *my* plan; it wasn't Carrots that thought of it at all," said Floss, who all this time had stood by, frightened and distressed, not knowing what to say.

"Hold your tongue, Floss," said Maurice, roughly; and Floss subsided. "Carrots," he continued, turning to his brother, "leave off crying this minute, and listen to me. Who put this piece of money into your paint-box?"

"I did my own self," said Carrots.

"What for?"

"To keep it a secret for Floss," sobbed Carrots.

Maurice turned triumphantly to nurse.

"There," he said, "you see! And," he continued to Carrots again, "you took it out of nurse's drawer — out of a little paper packet?"

"No," said Carrots, "I didn't. I didn't know it was nurse's."

"You didn't know nurse had lost a half-sovereign!" exclaimed Mott, "Carrots, how dare you say so?"

"Yes," said Carrots, looking so puzzled, that for a moment or two he forgot to sob, "I did know; Floss told me."

"Then how *can* you say you didn't know this was nurse's?" said Mott.

"Oh, I don't know — I didn't know — I can't under'tand," cried Carrots, relapsing into fresh sobs.

"I wish your mamma were in, that I do," said nurse, looking ready to cry too; by this time Floss's tears were flowing freely.

"She isn't in, so it's no good wishing she were," said Maurice; "but papa is," he went on importantly, "and I'll just take Carrots to him and see what *he'll* say to all this."

"Oh, no, Master Mott, don't do that, I beg and pray of you," said nurse, all but wringing her hands in entreaty. "Your papa doesn't understand about the little ones; do wait till your mamma comes in."

"No, indeed, nurse; it's a thing papa *should* be told," said Mott, in his innermost heart half inclined to yield, but working himself up to imagine he was acting very heroically. And notwithstanding nurse's distress, and Floss's tears, off he marched his unfortunate little brother to the study.

"Papa," he said, knocking at the door, "may I come in? There's something I must speak to you about immediately."

"Come in, then," was the reply. "Well, and what's the matter now? Has Carrots hurt himself?" asked his father, naturally enough, for his red-haired little son looked pitiable in the extreme as he crept into the room after Maurice, frightened, bewildered, and, so far as his gentle disposition was capable of such a feeling, indignant also, all at once.

"No," replied Maurice, pushing Carrots forward, "he's not hurt himself; it's worse than that. Papa," he continued excitedly, "you whipped me once, when I was a little fellow, for telling a story. I am very sorry to trouble you, but I think it's right you should know; I am afraid you will have to punish Carrots more severely than you punished me, for he's done worse than tell a story." Maurice stopped to take breath, and looked at his father to see the effect of his words. Carrots had stopped crying to listen to what Maurice was saying, and there he stood, staring up with his large brown eyes, two or three tears still struggling down his cheeks, his face smeared and red and looking very miserable. Yet he did not seem to be in the least ashamed of himself, and this somehow provoked Mott and hardened him against him.

"What's he been doing?" said their father, looking at the two boys with more amusement than anxiety, and then glancing regretfully at the newspaper which he had been comfortably reading when Mott's knock came to the door.

"He's done much worse than tell a story," repeated Maurice, "though for that matter he's told two or three stories too. But, papa, you know about nurse losing a half-sovereign? Well, *Carrots* had got it all the time; he took it out of nurse's purse, and hid it away in his paint-box, without telling anybody. He can't deny it, though he tried to."

"Carrots," said his father sternly, "is this true?"

Carrots looked up in his father's face; that face, generally so kind and merry, was now all gloom and displeasure — why? — Carrots could not understand, and he was too frightened and miserable to collect his little wits together to try to do so. He just gave a sort of little tremble and began to cry again.

"Carrots," repeated his father, "is this true?"

"I don't know," sobbed Carrots.

Now Captain Desart, Carrots' father, was, as I think I have told you, a sailor. If any of you children have a sailor for your father, you must not think I mean to teach you to be disrespectful when I say that sailors *are*, there is no doubt, inclined to be hot-tempered and hasty. And I do not think on the whole that they understand much about children, though they are often very fond of them and very kind. All this was the case with Carrots' father. He had been so much away from his children while they were little, that he really hardly knew how they had been brought up or trained or anything about their childish ways — he had left them entirely to his wife, and scarcely considered them as in any way "*his* business," till they were quite big boys and girls.

But once he did begin to notice them, though very kind, he was very strict. He had most decided opinions about the only way of checking their faults whenever these were serious enough to

attract his attention, and he could not and would not be troubled with arguing, or what he called "splitting hairs," about such matters. A fault was a fault; telling a falsehood was telling a falsehood; and he made no allowance for the excuses or "palliating circumstances" there might be to consider. One child, according to his ideas, was to be treated exactly like another; why the same offence should deserve severer punishment with a self-willed, self-confident, bold, matter-of-fact lad, such as Maurice, than with a timid, fanciful, baby-like creature as was his little Fabian, he could not have understood had he tried.

Nurse knew all this by long experience; no wonder, kind though she knew her master to be, that she trembled when Mott announced his intention of laying the whole affair before his father.

But poor Carrots did not know anything about it. "Papa" had never been "cross" to him before, and he was far from clearly understanding why he was "cross" to him now. So he just sobbed and said "I don't know," which was about the worst thing he could possibly have said in his own defence, though literally the truth.

"No or yes, sir," said Captain Desart, his voice growing louder and sterner — I think he really forgot that it was a poor little shrimp of six years old he was speaking to — "no nonsense of 'don't knows.' Did you or did you not take nurse's half-

sovereign out of her drawer and keep it for your own?"

"No," said Carrots, "I never took nucken out of nurse's drawer. I never did, papa, and I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns."

"Didn't you know nurse had *lost* a half-sovereign? Carrots, how can you say so?" interrupted Mott.

"Yes, Floss told me," said Carrots.

"And Floss hid it away in your paint-box, I suppose?" said Mott, sarcastically.

"No, Floss didn't. I hided the sixpenny my own self," said Carrots, looking more and more puzzled.

"Hold your tongue, Maurice," said his father, angrily. "Go and fetch the money and the tom-fool paint-box thing that you say he had it in."

Mott did as he was told. He ran to the nursery and back as fast as he could; but, unobserved by him, Floss managed to run after him and crept into the study so quietly that her father never noticed her.

Maurice laid the old paint-box and the half-sovereign down on the table in front of his father; Captain Desart held up the little coin between his finger and thumb.

"Now," he said, "Carrots, look at this. Did you or did you not take this piece of money out of nurse's drawer and hide it away in your paint-box?"

Carrots stared hard at the half-sovereign.

"I did put it in my paint-box," he said, and then he stopped.

"What for?" said his father.

"I wanted to keep it for a secret," he replied. "I wanted to — to — "

"*What?*" thundered Captain Desart.

"To buy something at the toy-shop with it," sobbed Carrots.

Captain Desart sat down and looked at Mott for sympathy.

"Upon my soul," he said, "one could hardly believe it. A child that one would think scarcely knew the value of money! Where can he have learnt such cunning; you say you are sure he was told of nurse's having lost a half-sovereign?"

"Oh, yes," said Mott; "he confesses to that much himself."

"Floss told me," said Carrots.

"Then how can you pretend you didn't know this was nurse's — taking it out of her drawer, too," said his father.

"I don't know. I didn't take it out of her drawer; it was 'aside Floss's doll," said Carrots.

"He's trying to equivocate," said his father. Then he turned to the child again, looking more determined than ever.

"Carrots," he said, "I must whip you for this. Do you know that I am ashamed to think you are my son? If you were a poor boy you might be put in prison for this."

Carrots looked too bewildered to understand. "In

prison," he repeated. "Would the prison-man take me?"

"What does he mean?" said Captain Desart.

Floss, who had been waiting unobserved in her corner all this time, thought this a good opportunity for coming forward.

"He means the policeman," she said. "Oh, papa," she went on, running up to her little brother and throwing her arms round him, the tears streaming down her face, "oh, papa, poor little Carrots! he *doesn't* understand."

"Where did *you* come from?" said her father, gruffly but not unkindly, for Floss was rather a favourite of his. "What do you mean about his not understanding? Did you know about this business, Floss?"

"Oh no, papa," said Floss, her face flushing; "I'm too big not to understand."

"Of course you are," said Captain Desart; "and Carrots is big enough, too, to understand the very plain rule that he is not to touch what does not belong to him. He was told, too, that nurse had lost a half-sovereign, and he might then have owned to having taken it and given it back, and then things would not have looked so bad. Take him up to my dressing-room, Maurice, and leave him there till I come."

"May I go with him, papa?" said Floss very timidly.

"No," said her father, "you may not."

So Mott led off poor weeping Carrots, and all the way upstairs he kept sobbing to himself, "I never touched nurse's sovereigns. I never did. I didn't know she had any sovereigns."

"Hold your tongue," said Mott; "what is the use of telling more stories about it?"

"I didn't tell stories. I said I hided the sixpenny my own self, but I never touched nurse's sovereigns; I never did."

"I believe you're more than half an idiot," said Mott, angry and yet sorry — angry with himself, too, somehow.

Floss, left alone with her father, ventured on another appeal.

"You won't whip Carrots till mamma comes in, will you, papa?" she said softly.

"Why not? Do you think I want her to help me to whip him?" said Captain Desart.

"Oh no — but — I think perhaps mamma would understand better how it was, for, oh papa, dear, Carrots *isn't* a naughty boy; he never, never tells stories."

"Well, we'll see," replied her father; "and in the meanwhile it will do him no harm to think things over by himself in my dressing-room for a little."

"Oh, poor Carrots!" murmured Floss to herself; "it'll be getting dark, and he's all alone. I *wish* mamma would come in!"

FLOSS TAPPED AT THE DOOR. "CARROTS," SHE SAID, "ARE YOU THERE?" — p. 55.

CHAPTER VI.

CARROTS "ALL ZIGHT" AGAIN.

"When next the summer breeze comes by,
And waves the bush, the flower is dry."

WALTER SCOTT.

FLOSS crept upstairs to the dressing-room door. It was locked. Though the key was in the lock, she knew she must not turn it; and even had it been open she would not have dared to go in, after her father's forbidding it. But she thought she might venture to speak to Carrots, to comfort him a little, through the door. She was dreadfully afraid that he might feel frightened in there alone if it got dark before he was released, for sometimes he *was* afraid of the dark — he was such a little boy, remember.

Floss tapped at the door.

"Carrots," she said, "are you there?"

"Yes," said Carrots; "but you can't come in, Floss. Mott has locked me in."

"I know," said Floss; "what are you doing, Carrots. Are you very unhappy?"

"Not so very. I'm crying — I'm crying a great lot, Floss, but I don't think I'm so very unhappy — not now you've come to the door."

"Poor Carrots," said Floss, "I'll stay by the door,

if you like. I'll just run down to the front door now and then, to see if mamma is coming, and then I'll come straight back to you."

"All zight," said Carrots. Whenever he wanted to seem very brave, and rather a big boy, he used to say "all zight," and just now he was trying very hard to be like a big boy.

There was silence for a minute or two. Then Carrots called out again.

"Floss," he said, "are you there?"

"Yes, dear," replied faithful Floss.

"I want just to tell you *one* thing," he said. "Floss, I never did touch nurse's sovereigns. I never knowed she had any."

"It wasn't a sovereign; it was a *half*-sovereign," corrected Floss.

"I don't under'tand how it *could* be a half-sovereign," said Carrots. "But I never touched nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it."

"Then where *did* you find the half-sovereign?" began Floss, "and why — oh, Carrots," she broke off, "I do believe that's the front door bell. It'll be mamma coming. I must run down."

"All zight," called out Carrots again. "Don't be long, Floss; but please tell mamma all about it. I *don't* under'tand."

He gave a little sigh of perplexity, and lay down on the floor near the window, where the room was lightest, for the darkness was now beginning to creep in, and he felt very lonely.

Poor Mrs. Desart hardly knew what to think or say, when, almost before she had got into the house, she was seized upon by Maurice and Floss, each eager to tell their own story. *Carrots* naughty, *Carrots* in disgrace, was such an extraordinary idea!

"Nurse," she exclaimed, perceiving her at the end of the passage, whence she had been watching as anxiously as the children for her mistress's return, "nurse, what is the meaning of it all?"

"Indeed, ma'am," nurse was beginning, but she was interrupted. "Come in here, Lucy," said Captain Desart to his wife, opening the study door, "come in here before you go upstairs."

And Mrs. Desart did as he asked, but Floss again managed to creep in too, almost hidden in the folds of her mother's dress.

"I can't believe that Carrots is greedy, or cunning, or obstinate," said his mother, when she had heard all. "I cannot think that he understood what he was doing when he took the half-sovereign."

"But the hiding it," said Captain Desart, "the hiding it, and yet to my face persisting that he had never touched nurse's half-sovereign. I can't make the child out."

"He says he didn't know nurse had any sovereigns," put in Floss.

"Are you there again, you ubiquitous child?" said her father.

Floss looked rather frightened — such a long word

as ubiquitous must surely mean something very naughty; but her father's voice was not angry, so she took courage.

"Does he know what a sovereign means?" said Mrs. Desart. "Perhaps there is some confusion in his mind which makes him seem obstinate when he isn't so really."

"He said he knew *I* had sovereigns," said Floss, "and I couldn't think what he meant. Oh, mamma," she went on suddenly, "I do believe I know what he was thinking of. It was my kings and queens."

And before her father or mother could stop her, she had darted off to the nursery. In two minutes she was back again, holding out to her mother a round wooden box — the sort of box one often used to see with picture alphabets for little children, but instead of an alphabet, Floss's box contained a set of round cards, each about the size of the top of a wine-glass, with the heads of all the English kings and queens, from William the Conqueror down to Victoria!

"'Sovereigns of England,' mamma, you see," she exclaimed, pointing to the words on the lid, and quite out of breath with hurry and excitement, "and I very often call them my sovereigns; and of course Carrots didn't understand how there could be a *half* one of them, nor how nurse could have any."

"It must be so," said Mrs. Desart to her husband; "the poor child really did *not* understand."

"But still the taking the money at all, and hiding it?" said Captain Desart. "I don't see that it would be right not to punish him."

"He has been punished already — pretty severely for him, I fancy," said Floss's mother, with a rather sad smile. "You will leave him to me now, won't you, Frank?" she asked her husband. "I will go up and see him, and try to make him thoroughly understand. Give me the sovereigns, Floss dear, I'll take them with me."

Somewhat slowly, Carrots' mother made her way upstairs. She was tired and rather troubled. She did not believe that her poor little boy had really done wrong wilfully, but it seemed difficult to manage well among so many children; she was grieved, also, at Maurice's hastiness and want of tender feeling, and she saw, too, how little fitted Carrots was to make his way in this rough-and-ready world.

"How would it be without me! My poor children," she thought with a sigh.

But a little hand was slipped into hers.

"Mamma, dear, I'm *so* glad you thought of the sovereigns. I'm *sure* Carrots didn't mean to be naughty. Mamma dear, though he *is* so little, Carrots always means to be good; I don't think he could even be frightened into doing anything that he understood was naughty, though he is so easily frightened other ways."

"My good little Floss, my comforter," said her

mother, patting Floss's hand, and then they together made their way to the dressing-room.

It was almost dark. The key was in the lock, and Mrs. Desart felt for it and turned it. But when she opened the door it was too dark in the room to distinguish anything.

"Carrots," she said, but there was no answer. "Where can he be?" she said rather anxiously. "Floss, run and get a light."

Floss ran off: she was back again in a minute, for she had met nurse on the stairs with a candle in her hand. But even with the light they could not all at once find Carrots, and though they called to him there was no answer.

"Can he have got out of the window?" Mrs. Desart was beginning to say, when Floss interrupted her.

"Here he is, mamma," she exclaimed. "Oh, poor little Carrots! mamma, nursie, do look."

There he was indeed — fast, fast asleep! Extra fast sleep, for his troubles and his tears had worn him out. He was lying in a corner of a large closet opening out of the dressing-room. In this closet Captain Desart hung up his coats and dressing-gowns, and doubtless Carrots had crept into it when the room began to get dark, feeling as if in the hanging garments there was some comfort and protection; and there he lay, looking so fair and innocent, prettier than when he was awake, for his

cheeks had more colour, and his long eye-lashes, reddy-brown like his hair, showed clearly on his fair skin.

"Poor little fellow, how sweet he looks," said Mrs. Desart. "Nurse, lift him up and try to put him to bed without waking him. We must wait to disentangle the confusion in his mind till to-morrow morning."

And very tenderly nurse lifted him up and carried him off.

"My bonnie wee man," she murmured; for though it was many and many a day since she had seen her native land, and she had journeyed with her master and mistress to strange countries "far over the sea," she was apt when her feelings were stirred to fall back into her own childish tongue.

So no more was said to or about Carrots that evening; but Floss went to bed quite happy and satisfied that "mamma" would put it all right in the morning. I don't think Mott went to bed in so comfortable a mood; yet his mother had said nothing to him!

Cecil and Louise had, though. Cecil told him right out that he was a horrid tell-tale, and Louise said she only wished *he* had red hair instead of Carrots; which expressions of feeling on the part of such very grown-up young ladies meant a good deal, for it was not often they troubled themselves much about nursery matters. Cecil, that is to say, for Louise, who was fair-haired and soft and gentle, and

played very nicely on the piano, was just a shadow of Cecil, and if Cecil had proposed that they should stay in bed all day and get up all night, would have thought it a very good idea!

And the next morning Mrs. Desart had a long talk with Carrots. It was all explained and made clear, and the difference between the two kinds of "sovereigns" shown to him. And he told his mother all — all, that is to say, except the "plan" for saving sugar and getting money instead, which had first put it into his head to keep the half-sovereign to get a new doll for Floss. He began to tell about the plan, but stopped when he remembered that it was Floss's secret as well as his own; and when he told his mother this, she said he was quite right not to tell without Floss's leave, and that as nurse knew about it, they might still keep it for their secret, if they liked, which Carrots was very glad to hear.

He told his mother about his thinking perhaps the fairies had brought the "sixpenny," and she explained to him that now-a-days, alas! that was hardly likely to be the case, though she seemed quite to understand his fancying it, and did not laugh at him at all. But she spoke very gravely to him, too, about *never* taking anything that was not his; and after listening and thinking with all his might, Carrots said he thought he "kite under'tood."

"I am never, never to take nucken that I'm not sure is mine," he said slowly. "And if ever I'm not

sure I'm to ask somebody, you, or nursie, or Floss — or *sometimes*, perhaps, Cecil. But I don't think I'd better ask Mott, for perhaps he wouldn't under'tand."

But Mott's mother took care that before the day was over Mott *should* "under'tand" something of where and how he had been in fault; that there are sometimes ways of doing *right* which turn it into "wrong"; and that want of pity and tenderness for the wrong-*doer* never, never can be right.

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG AGO STORY.

"You may laugh, my little people,
But be sure my story's true;
For I vow by yon church steeple,
I was once a child like you."
THE LAND OF LONG AGO.

IF any of you children have travelled much, have you noticed that on a long journey there seem to come points, turns — I hardly know what to call them — after which the journey seems to go on differently. More quickly, perhaps more cheerfully, or possibly less so, but certainly *differently*. Looking back afterwards you see it was so — "from the time we all looked out of the window at the ruined abbey we seemed to get on so much faster," you would say, or — "after the steamer had passed the Spearhead Point, we began to feel dull and tired, and there was no more sunshine."

I think it is so in life. Suddenly, often quite unknowingly, we turn a corner sometimes of our history, sometimes of our characters, and looking back, long afterwards, we make a date of that point. It was so just now with my little Carrots. This trouble of his about the half-sovereign changed him.

I do not mean to say that it saddened him and made him less happy than he had been — at his age, thank God, few, if any children have it in them to be so deeply affected — but it *changed* him. It was his first peep out into life, and it gave him his first real *thoughts* about things. It made him see how a little wrong doing may cause great sorrow; it gave him his first vague, misty glimpse of that, to my thinking, saddest of all sad things — the way in which it is possible for our very nearest and dearest to mistake and misunderstand us.

He had been in some ways a good deal of a baby for his age, there is no doubt. He had a queer, baby-like way of not seeming to take in quickly what was said to him, and staring up in your face with his great oxen-like eyes, that did a little excuse Maurice's way of laughing at him and telling him he was "half-witted." But no one that really looked at those honest, sensible, tender eyes could for an instant have thought there was any "want" in their owner. It was all *there* — the root of all goodness, cleverness, and manliness — just as in the acorn there is the oak; but of course it had a great deal of *growing* before it, and, more than mere growing, it would need all the care and watchful tenderness and wise directing that could be given it, just as the acorn needs all the rain and sunshine and good nourishing soil it can get, to become a fine oak, straight and strong and beautiful. For what do I mean by

"it," children? I mean the "own self" of Carrots, the wonderful "something" in the little childish frame which the wisest of all the wise men of either long ago or now-a-days have never yet been able to describe—the "soul," children, which is in you all, which may grow into so beautiful, so lovely and perfect a thing; which may, alas! be twisted and stunted and starved out of all likeness to the "image" in which it was created.

Do you understand a little why it seems sometimes such a very, very solemn thing to have the charge of children? When one thinks what they *should* be, and again when one thinks what they *may* be, is it not a solemn, almost too solemn a thought? Only we, who feel this so deeply, take heart when we remember that the Great Gardener who never makes mistakes has promised to help us: even out of *our* mistakes to bring good.

As I have said, the affair of the lost half-sovereign did not leave any lastingly painful impression on Carrots, but for some days he seemed unusually quiet and pale and a little sad. He had caught cold, too, with falling asleep on the dressing-room floor, nurse said, for the weather was still exceedingly chilly, though the spring was coming on. So altogether he was rather a miserable looking little Carrots.

He kept out of the way and did not complain, but "mamma" and nurse and Floss did not need com-

plaints to make them see that their little man was not quite himself, and they were extra kind to him.

There came just then some very dull rainy days, regular rainy days, not stormy, but to the children much more disagreeable than had they been so. For in *stormy* weather at the seaside there is too much excitement for any one to think whether it is disagreeable or not — there is the splendid sight of the angry, troubled sea, there are the wonderful "storm songs" of the wind to listen to. Of course, as Carrots used to say, at such times it is "dedful" to think of the poor sailors; but even in thinking of them there is something that takes one's thoughts quite away from one's self, and one's own worries and troubles — all the marvellous stories of shipwreck and adventure, from Grace Darling to old Sinbad, come rushing into one's mind, and one feels as if the sea were the only part of the world worth living on.

But even at the seaside, regular, steady, "stupid" rainy days are trying. Carrots sat at the nursery window one of these dull afternoons looking out wistfully.

"Floss," he said, for Floss was sitting on the floor learning her geography for the next day, "Floss, it *is* so raining."

"I know," said Floss, stopping a minute in her "principal rivers of northern Europe." "I wish there wasn't so much rain, and then there wouldn't

be so many rivers; or perhaps if there weren't so many rivers there wouldn't be so much rain. I wonder which it is!"

"Which beginned first — rivers or rain?" said Carrots, meditatively, "*that* would tell."

"I'm sure I don't know, and I don't believe anybody does," said Floss, going on again with her lesson. "Be quiet, Carrots, for one minute, and then I'll talk to you."

Carrots sat silent for about a minute and a half; then he began again.

"Floss," he said.

"Well," replied Floss, "I've very nearly done, Carrots."

"It's werry dull to-day, Floss; the sea looks dull too, it isn't dancey a bit to-day, and the sands look as if they would *never* be nice for running on again."

"Oh, but they will, Master Carrots," said nurse, who was sitting near, busy darning stockings. "Dear, dear! don't I remember feeling just so when I was a child? In winter thinking summer would never come, and in summer forgetting all about winter!"

"Is it a werry long time since you were a child?" inquired Carrots, directing his attention to nurse.

"It's getting on for a good long time, my dear," said nurse, with a smile.

"Please tell me about it," said Carrots.

"Oh yes, nursie dear, do," said Floss, jumping up from the floor and shutting her book. "I've done all my lessons, and it would just be nice to have a story. It would amuse poor little Carrots."

"But you know all my stories as well, or even better, than I do myself," objected nurse, "not that they were ever much to tell, any of them."

"Oh yes, they were. They are very nice stories indeed," said Floss, encouragingly. "And I'm very fond of what you call your mother's stories, too — aren't you, Carrots? — about the children she was nurse to — Master Hugh and Miss Janet. Tell us more about them, nursie."

"You've heard all the stories about them, my dears, I'm afraid," said nurse. "At least, I can't just now think of any worth telling but what you've heard."

"Well, let's hear some not worth the telling," said Floss, persistently. "Nurse," she went on, "how old must Master Hugh and Miss Janet be by now? Do you know where they are?"

"Master Hugh is dead," said nurse, "many a year ago, poor fellow, and little Miss Janet — why she was fifteen years older than I; mother only left them to be married when Miss Janet was past twelve. She must be quite an old lady by now, if she is alive — with grandchildren as old as you, perhaps! How strange it seems!"

"She must have been a very nice little girl, and

so must Master Hugh have been — a nice little boy, I mean. That story of 'Mary Ann Jolly' was *so* interesting. I suppose they *never* did anything naughty?" said Floss, insinuatingly.

"Oh, but they did," replied nurse, quite unsuspicious of the trap laid for her. "Master Hugh was very mischievous. Did I never tell you what they did to their dog Cæsar?"

"No, never," said both the children in a breath; "do tell us."

"Well, it was one Sunday morning, to tell it as mother told me," began nurse. "You know, my dears," she broke off again, "it was in Scotland, and rather an out-of-the-way part where they lived. I know the place well, of course, for it wasn't till I was seventeen past that I ever left it. It is a pretty place, out of the way even now, I'm told, with railways and all, and in those days it was even more out-of-the-way. Six miles from the church, and the prayers and the sermon very long when you got there! Many and many a time *I've* fallen asleep at church, when I was a little girl. Well, to go back to Master Hugh and Miss Janet. It was on a Sunday morning they did the queer piece of mischief I'm going to tell you of. They had been left at home with no one but an old woman, who was too deaf to go to church, to look after them. She lived in the lodge close by, and used to come into the house to help when the servants were busy, for she was a very

trusty old body. It was not often the children were left without mother, or perhaps one of the housemaids, to take care of them, and very often in fine weather they used to be taken to church themselves, though it was tiring like for such young things. But this Sunday, everybody had gone to church because it was the time of the preachings —"

"The *what*, nurse?" said Floss. "Isn't there preaching every Sunday at church?"

"Oh yes, my dear; but what we call the preachings in Scotland means the time when there is the communion service, which is only twice a year. You can't understand, my dear," seeing that Floss looked as mystified as ever; "but never mind. When you are older, you will find that there are many different ways of saying and doing the same things in churches, just like among people. But this Sunday I am telling you of, the services were to be very long indeed, too long for the children, considering the six miles' drive and all. So they were left at home with old Phemie."

"Did they mind?" said Carrots.

"Oh no; I fancy they were very well pleased. They were always very happy together, the two of them and Cæsar."

"And of course they promised to be very good," said Floss.

"No doubt of that," said nurse, with a smile. "Well, they certainly hit upon a queer way of amus-

ing themselves. Mother came home from church one of the earliest; she had a lift in one of the farmer's carts, and came in at the lodge gate just as the carriage with her master and mistress and the young ladies was driving up. They all got out at the big gate, and let the coachman drive round to the stable the back way, and mother came quietly walking up the drive behind them. They were talking seriously about the sermon they had heard, and feeling rather solemn-like, I dare say, when all at once there flew down the drive to meet them the most fearsome-like creature that ever was seen. It was like nothing in nature, my mother said, about the size of a large wolf, but with a queer-shaped head and body — at least they looked queer to them, not knowing what it was — and not a particle of hair or coat of any kind upon it. It rushed up to my lady, that was Miss Janet's mother, and tried to leap upon her; but she shrieked to her husband, and he up with his stick — he always took a stick about with him — and was just on the point of giving it a fearful blow, never thinking but what it was one of the beasts escaped from some travelling show, when one of the young ladies caught his arm.

"'Stop, father!' she cried. 'Don't you see who it is? It's *Cæsar*.'

"'*Cæsar!*' said he. 'My dear, *that's* never Cæsar.'

"But Cæsar it was, as they soon saw by the way he jumped and whined, and seemed to beg them to

understand he was himself. He was frightened out of his wits, poor doggie, for he had never felt so queer before, and couldn't understand what had come over him."

"And what *had* come over him?" asked the children eagerly.

"Why, Master Hugh and Miss Janet had spent the morning in cropping him!" replied nurse. "The hair, and he had great long thick hair, was cut off as close and as neat as if it had been shaved; it was really wonderful how clean they had done it without cutting or wounding the poor doggie. They had taken great pains about it, and had spent the best part of the morning over it — the two of them, Master Hughie with the great kitchen scissors, and Miss Janet with a wee fine pair she had found in her mamma's workbox, the little monkey! And such a sight as the kitchen dresser was with hair! For they told how they had made Cæsar jump up on to the dresser and lie first on one side and then on the other, till all was cut off."

"Were they punished?" asked Floss, anxiously. And at this question Carrots looked very woe-begone.

"They were *going* to be," said nurse, "but somehow, I cannot justly say how it was, they were let off. The whole thing was such a queer idea, their father and mother could not but laugh at it, though they didn't let the children see them. And what do

you think my lady did? She took all poor Cæsar's hair and spun it up into worsted for knitting, mixing it, of course, with long yarn."

"Did *she* spin?" asked Floss. "I thought you said she was a lady."

"And that she was, Miss Flossie, and none the less so for being able to spin and to knit, and to cook too, I dare say," said nurse. "But ladies, and high born ones too, in those days turned their hands to many things they think beneath them now. I know Miss Janet's mother would never have thought of letting any one but herself wash up her breakfast and tea services. The cups were a sight to be seen, certainly, of such beautiful old china; they were worth taking care of; and that's how old china has been kept together. There isn't much of what's in use now-a-days will go down to your grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, Miss Flossie, with the smashing and dashing that goes on. My lady had a white wood bowl kept on purpose, and the napkin of the finest damask, and a large apron of fine holland that she put on, and, oh yes, a pair of embroidered holland cuffs she used to draw on over her sleeves up to the elbow; and a lady she looked, I can assure you, rinsing out and drying her beautiful cups, with her pretty white hands!"

"Did you ever see her?" asked Floss.

"Yes, when she was getting to be quite an old lady, I've seen her several times when I've been

sent up a message by mother to the house. For my mother was a great favourite of hers; I never went there but my lady would have me in to have a piece."

"A *piece?*" repeated Floss.

Nurse laughed. "A slice of bread and jam, I should say, my dear. I forget that I'm far away from the old life when I get to talking of those days. And to think I'm getting on to be quite an old woman myself; older in some ways than my lady ever was, for my hair is fast turning gray, and hers had never a silver streak in it to the last day of her life, and she died at eighty-four!"

Carrots was getting a little tired, for he hardly understood all that nurse was saying. To create a diversion he climbed up on to her knee, and began stroking her face.

"Never mind, nursie," he said. "I'll always love you, even when your hair's *kite* gray, and I would marry you if you like when I'm big, only I've promised to marry Floss."

"Oh you funny little Carrots," said Floss. "But nurse," she went on, "what did Janet's mamma do with the hair when she had spun it?"

"She knitted it into a pair of stockings for Master Hughie," said nurse; "but they weren't much use. They were well enough to look at, but no mortal boy could have worn them without his legs being skinned, they *were* so pricky."

"And what became of Cæsar?" said Floss. "Did his hair ever grow again?"

"Oh yes," said nurse, "in time it did, though I believe it never again looked quite so silky and nice. But Cæsar lived to a good old age, for all that. He didn't catch cold, for my lady made mother make him a coat of a bit of soft warm cloth, which he wore for some time."

"How funny he must have looked," said Floss.

"What are you talking about?" said a voice behind her, and turning round, Floss saw Cecil, who had come into the room without their hearing her.

"About a doggie," answered Carrots. "Oh, Cis, nurse has been telling us such a lubly story about a doggie. Nursie, dear, won't you tell us another to-morrow?"

"My stories are all worn out, my dear," said nurse, shaking her head.

"Couldn't *you* tell us one, Cis?" said Carrots.

"Make up one, do you mean?" said Cecil. "No, indeed, I'm sure I never could. Are they always at you to tell them stories, nurse? If so, I pity you."

"Poor little things," said nurse, "it's dull for them these wet days, Miss Cecil, and Master Carrots' cold has been bad."

Cecil looked at her little brother's pale face as he sat nestling in nurse's arms, and a queer new feeling of compunction seized her.

"I couldn't *tell* you a story," she said; "but if you like, the first afternoon it's rainy, and you can't go out, I'll *read* you one. Miss Barclay lent me a funny old-fashioned little book the other day, and some of the stories in it are fairy ones. Would you like that, Carrots?"

Floss clapped her hands, and Carrots slid down from nurse's knee, and coming quietly up to Cecil, threw his arms round her neck, and gave her a kiss.

"I hope it'll rain to-morrow," he said, gravely.

"It *is* kind of Miss Cecil," said nurse; and as Cecil left the nursery she added to herself, "it will be a comfort to her mother if she begins to take thought for the little ones, and I've always felt sure it was in her to do so, if only she could get into the way of it."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE BEWITCHED TONGUE."

"Thou wilt not fail
To listen to a fairy tale."

LEWIS CARROLL.

IT *did* rain the next day! And Cecil did not forget her promise. Just as the old nursery clock was striking four, a full hour still to her tea-time, she marched into the room with a little old brown book in her hand. I wonder if any of you have ever seen that little old book, or one like it, I should say? It was about the size of the first edition of "Evenings at Home," which some of you are sure to have in your book-cases. For I should think *everybody's* grandfathers and grandmothers had an "Evenings at Home" among their few, dearly-prized children's books.

Do you know how very few those books were? You may have heard it, but I scarcely fancy you have ever thought over the great difference between yourselves and long-ago-children in this respect. Now-a-days, when you have galloped through all the brilliant blue and green and scarlet little volumes that have been given to you on birthdays and Christmas-days, you come with a melancholy face

to your mother, and tell her you have "nothing to read." And then, most likely, when your mother goes to the library, she chooses a book for you out of the "juvenile department," and when it is done you get another, till you can hardly remember what you have read and what you haven't. But as for reading any book twice over, *that* is never to be thought of.

Not so was it long ago. Not only had no children many books, but everywhere children had the same! There was seldom any use in little friends lending to each other, for it was always the same thing over again: "Evenings at Home," "Sandford and Merton," "Ornaments Discovered," and so on.

You think, I dare say, that it must have been very stupid and tiresome to have so little variety, but *I* think you are in some ways mistaken. Children really *read* their books in those days; they put more of themselves into their reading, so that, stupid as these quaint old stories might seem to you now-a-days, they never seemed so then. What was wanting in them the children filled up out of their own fresh hearts and fancies, and however often they read and re-read them, they always found something new. They got to know the characters in their favourite stories like real friends, and would talk them over with their companions, and compare their opinions about them in a way that made each book as good, or better, than a dozen.

So there is something to be said for this part of the "ancien régime" — if you do not understand what that means, you will some day — after all!

The volume that Cecil Desart brought into the nursery was called "Faults Corrected; or," (there was always long ago an "or" in the titles of books) "Beneficent Influences."

"Some of the stories are stupid," said Cecil, as she sat down. "Miss Barclay said it was her mother's when she was a little girl, so it must be rather ancient; but I think I've found one that will amuse you, and that Carrots can understand."

"What's it called?" said Floss, peering over her sister's shoulder. "'Faults Corrected; or, Ben — ben —' what word's that, Cecil?"

"Sit *down*, Floss, and be quiet, or I won't read to you," said Cecil, emphatically. "That's the name of the whole book you are looking at, and you wouldn't understand the word if I told it you. The name of the story I'm going to read to you is, 'The Bewitched Tongue; or, Think before you speak. A Fairy Tale.'"

Floss would have liked to clap her hands, but she was afraid of another snub from Cecil, so she restrained her feelings.

"When there come very long words," continued Cecil — "there often are in old books — I'll change them to easy ones, so that Carrots may understand. Now, be quiet all of you, I'm going to begin. 'The

"Now, be Quiet all of you, I'm going to begin."—p. 80.

Bewitched Tongue, etc.' I'm not going to read all the title again. 'In a beautiful mansion' (that just means a fine house, Carrots) 'surrounded by pleasure grounds of great extent, there lived, many years ago, a young girl named Elizabetha. She was of charming appearance and pleasing manners; her parents loved her devotedly, her brothers and sisters looked upon her with amiable affection, her teachers found her docile and intelligent. Yet Elizabetha constantly found herself, despite their affection, shunned and feared by her best and nearest friends, and absolutely disliked by those who did not know her well enough to feel assured of the real goodness of her heart.

'This sad state of things was all owing to one unfortunate habit. She had a hasty tongue. Whatever thought was uppermost in her mind at the moment, she expressed without reflection; she never remembered the wholesome adage, "Think before you speak," or that other excellent saying, "Second thoughts are best."

'Her disposition was far from unamiable or malicious, yet the mischief of which she was the cause was indescribable. Every servant in the household dreaded to hear the sound of her voice, for many had she involved in trouble and disgrace; and as her temper was naturally quick and impetuous, and she never attempted to check her first expressions of provocation, small and even trifling disagreements were by her foolish tongue exaggerated into lasting

discord, long after all real cause of offence had passed from her mind.

'"My brother will not forgive me," she confessed one day to her mother, with many tears, "and the quarrel was only that he had broken the vase of flowers that stand on my table. I forgave *him* — I would rather lose twenty vases than his affection — and yet he will not speak to me, and passes me by with indignant looks."

'"And did you at once express your forgiveness to him, Elizabetha?" said her mother. "When you first discovered the accident, what words escaped you?"

'Elizabetha reflected, and presently her colour rose.

'"I fear, ma'am," she said, "I fear that at the first sight of the broken vase I spoke unguardedly. I exclaimed that without doubt Adolphus had thrown down the ornament on purpose to annoy me, and that I wished so mean-spirited a youth were not my brother. My little sister Celia was beside me at the time — can she have carried to him what I said? I did not really mean that; my words were but the momentary expression of my vexation."

'Her mother gravely shook her head.

'"It is your own doing altogether, Elizabetha," she said, "and you cannot complain that your brother resents so unkind and untrue a charge."

'Elizabetha burst into tears, but the harm was done, and it was some time before Adolphus could forget the pain of her unjust and hasty words.

'Another day her little brother Jacky had just with great pains and care written out his task for the next morning, when, having been called to supper, he found on his return to the schoolroom his exercise book all blotted and disfigured.

'"Who can have done this?" he cried in distress.

'Elizabetha was just entering the room.

'"Oh," she exclaimed, "it is Sukey, the under-housemaid, that you have to thank for that. I saw her coming out of the room, and she had no reason to enter it. Out of curiosity she has been looking at your books, and blotted your exercise."

'Jacky was but eight years old, full young for prudence or reflection. Downstairs he flies, his face inflamed with anger, and meeting the unfortunate Sukey at the door of the servants' hall, upbraids her in no gentle terms for her impertinence. In vain the poor girl defends herself, and denies Master Jacky's accusation; the other servants come to the rescue, and the whole household is in an uproar, till suddenly Miss Elizabetha is named as the source of the mischief.

'"Ah," says the old housekeeper, "do not distress yourself, Sukey; we all know what Miss Elizabetha's tongue is!"

'And thereupon the poor girl is freed from blame. She had only gone to the schoolroom by the desire of an upper servant to mend the fire, and the real offender was discovered to have been the cat!

'This affair coming to the ears of Elizabetha's father, he reproved her with great severity. Mortified and chagrined, she, as usual, wept bitterly, and ashamed to meet the cold looks of the household, she hastened out into the garden and paced up and down a shady walk, where she imagined herself quite hidden from observation.'"

"Cis," interrupted Carrots at this point, "I don't understand the story."

"I'm very sorry," said Cecil, "I didn't notice what a lot of long words there are. Shall I leave off?"

"*I* understand it," said Floss.

"Then read it for Floss, please, Cis," said Carrots. "I'll be kite still."

"You're a good little boy," said Cecil; "I suppose I may as well finish it as I have begun. We're coming to the fairy part now. Perhaps you'll understand it better. Where was I? Oh yes, 'imagined herself quite hidden from observation. But in this she was mistaken, as my readers will see.

'She walked slowly up and down. "Oh my tongue, my cruel tongue!" she exclaimed, "what trouble it is the cause of! How can I cure myself of my rash speech?"

'"Do you in all sincerity wish to cure yourself, Elizabetha?" said a voice beside her; and turning in surprise at its sound, the young girl perceived at a few steps' distance a fair and sweet looking lady, clad in silvery-white, adorned with wreaths of the loveliest flowers.

'"Assuredly I do, gracious lady," replied Elizabetha, mastering as well as she was able her surprise, for she felt that this beautiful lady must be a fairy of high degree.

'"Then *I* will help you," said the lady, "but on one condition, hereafter to be explained. You are content to agree to this beforehand?"

'"To *anything*, kind fairy," replied the young girl, "if only my unhappy fault can be cured."

'The fairy smiled. "Hasty as ever," she murmured; "however, in *this* instance, you shall have no reason to regret your words. Put out your tongue, Elizabetha."

'Trembling slightly, the young girl obeyed. But her fears were uncalled for — the fairy merely touched the unruly member with her wand and whispered some words, the meaning of which Elizabetha could not understand.

'"Meet me here one week hence," said the fairy, "till then your tongue will obey *my* commands. And if you then feel you have reason to feel grateful to me, I will call upon you to redeem your promise."

'And before Elizabetha could reply, the lady had disappeared.

'Full of eagerness and curiosity, Elizabetha returned to the house. It was growing dusk, and as she sped along the garden paths something ran suddenly against her, causing her to trip and fall. As she got up she perceived that it was Fido, the dog of her brother Adolphus. The creature came bounding up to her again, full of play and affection. But in her fall Elizabetha had bruised herself; she felt angry and indignant.

'"Get off with you, you clumsy wretch," she exclaimed, or meant to exclaim. But to her amazement the words that issued from her mouth were quite otherwise.

'"Gently, gently, my poor Fido. Thou didst not mean to knock me down, however," she said in a kind and caressing tone, which the dog at once obeyed.

'Hardly knowing whether she were awake or dreaming, Elizabetha entered the house. She was met by her sister Maria.

'"Where have you been, Elizabetha?" she inquired. "Your friends the Misses Larkyn have been here, but no one could find you, so they have gone."

'Elizabetha felt extremely annoyed. She had not seen her friends for some weeks, and had much wished for a visit from them.

'"I think it was most ill-natured of none of you to look for me in the garden. You might have known I was there if you had cared to oblige me," were the words she intended to say, but instead of which were heard the following:

'"I thank you, my dear Maria. I am sorry to have missed my friends, but it cannot be helped."

'And when Maria, pleased by her gentleness, went on to tell her, that knowing that her disappointment would be great, and as the Misses Larkyn had been too pressed for time to linger, she had arranged to walk with Elizabetha the following day to see them, how rejoiced was Elizabetha that her intended words of unkindness had not been uttered! "Kind fairy, I thank thee!" she whispered to herself.

'The following day the same state of things continued. Many times before its close did Elizabetha's hasty temper endeavour to express itself in rash speech, but each time the tongue remained faithful to its new mistress. Whenever Elizabetha attempted to speak hastily, the words that issued from her lips were exactly the opposite of those she had intended to utter; and as her real disposition was amiable and good, not once did she regret the metamorphosis.

'Her parents, her brothers and sisters, and even the servants of the family, were amazed and delighted at the change.

'"Go on as thou hast begun, my child," said her father, on the morning of the day on which Eliza-

betha was again to meet the fairy, "and soon the name of Elizabetha will be associated with gentleness and discretion in speech as in deed."

'Elizabetha blushed. She would have liked to confess that the credit of the improvement was not her own; but a moment's reflection reminded her that she had not received permission to divulge the secret, and kissing affectionately her father's hand, she thanked him for his encouragement.

'At the appointed hour she was on the spot, awaiting the fairy, who soon appeared. A benignant smile overspread her features.

'"Well, Elizabetha," she said, "and hast thou found that I have deserved thy gratitude?"

'"Kind fairy," cried the young girl, "I cannot thank thee enough. Ask of me what thou wilt, I shall be only too ready to perform it."

'The fairy smiled. "My condition is a very simple one," she said. "It is only this. Whenever, Elizabetha, you feel yourself in the least degree discomposed or out of temper, utter no word till you have mentally counted the magic number seven. And if you follow this rule, it will be but seldom that your tongue, of which I now restore to you the full control" (she touched it again with her wand as she spoke) "will lead you into trouble. Your disposition, though generous, is naturally hasty and impulsive, and till by a long course of self-restraint you have acquired complete mastery over yourself,

you will find that I was right in my experiment of obliging your tongue to utter the exact opposite of what you, in your first haste, would have expressed."

'And before Elizabetha could reply, she had disappeared.

'But Elizabetha kept her promise, and to thus following her fairy friend's advice she owes it that she is now the object of universal esteem and affection, instead of being hated, despised, and feared as the owner of "a hasty tongue."'"

Cecil stopped.

"Is that all?" said Carrots.

"Yes, that's all. Did you like it?"

"I did understand better about the fairy," Carrots replied. "I think she was a werry good fairy; don't you, Floss?"

"*Very*," said Floss. "I think," she went on, "whenever I am cross, I shall *fancy* my tongue is bewitched, just to see if it would be best to say the opposite of what I was going to say. Wouldn't it be fun?"

"Better than fun, perhaps, Miss Flossie," said nurse. "I think it would be a very good thing if big people, too, were sometimes to follow the fairy's rule."

"People as big as you, nursie?" asked Carrots.

"Oh yes, my dear," said nurse. "It's a lesson we're all slow to learn, and many haven't learnt it

by the end of their threescore years and ten — 'to be slow to anger,' and to keep our tongues from evil."

"*That's* out of the Bible, nursie, all of it," said Floss, as if not altogether sure that she approved of the quotation.

Cecil laughed.

"What are you laughing at, Cis?" said Floss. "It *is* out of the Bible."

"Well, no one said it wasn't," said Cecil.

"Cis," said Carrots, "will you read us another story, another day?"

"If I can find one that you can understand," said Cecil.

"Never mind if I can't," replied Carrots. "I like to hear you reading, even if I can't understand. I like your voice. I *think*," he added after a pause, "I *think*, Cis, I'll marry you too, when I'm big. You and Floss, and nurse."

So Cecil had good reason to feel that she was greatly appreciated in the nursery.

CHAPTER IX.

SYBIL.

"The children crowned themselves with wishes,
And every wish came true."

CROWNS FOR CHILDREN.

BUT it is not always, or even often, that wishes "come true," is it children? Or if they do come true, it is in a different way; so different that they hardly seem the same. Like the little old woman in the ballad, who turned herself about and wondered and puzzled, but couldn't make out if she was herself or not, we stare at our fulfilled wishes and examine them on every side, but in their altered dress — *so* different from, and, very seldom, if ever, as pretty as that which they wore in our imagination — we cannot believe that they are themselves!

Do you remember the fancies that Carrots and Floss used to have about their cousin Sybil, and how they wished for her to come to see them? Well, about a fortnight after the affair of the lost half-sovereign, Sybil actually *did* come to see them! She and her mamma. But it all happened quite differently from the way the children had planned it, so that just at first they could hardly believe it *was* "a wish come true," though afterwards, when it was

over, and they began to look back to it as a real thing instead of forwards to it as a fancy, they grew to think it had really turned out nicer than any of their fancies.

You would like to hear all about it, I dare say.

It took them all by surprise — this sudden visit of Sybil and her mother, I mean. There was no time for planning or arranging anything. There just came a telegram one afternoon, to say that Mrs. — no, I don't think I will tell you the name of Sybil's mother, I want you just to think of her as "auntie" — and her little girl would arrive at Sandyshore, late that same evening, "to stay one day," said the telegram, on their way to some other place, it does not matter where.

It was several years since Captain Desart had seen his sister — that is, "auntie." He had been abroad at the time of her marriage, for she was a good many years younger than he, and since then, *she* and her husband had been a great deal out of England. But now at last they were going to have a settled home, and though it was a good way from Sandyshore, still it was not like being in another country.

"I am sorry Florence can only stay one day," said Mrs. Desart to her husband; "it seems hardly worth while for her to come so far out of her way for so short a time."

"I am sorry too," said Captain Desart; "but a day's better than nothing."

Floss and Carrots were sorry *too* — but what they were *most* sorry for was not that Sybil and her mamma were only going to stay there one day, it was that they would not arrive till after the children's bedtime! So much after, that there could not even be a question of their "sitting up till they come." There was even a doubt of Cecil and Louise doing so, and Floss could not help feeling rather pleased at Mott's getting a decided snub from his father when he broached the subject on his own account.

"Sit up till after ten o'clock — nonsense. Nobody wants you. Go to bed as usual, of course," said Captain Desart.

"How tired that poor little girl will be!" said Mrs. Desart pityingly. "Children, you must all be quiet in the morning so as not to wake her early. And you must be very gentle and kind to her, for you know she is not accustomed to companions."

"Yes, mamma," said Floss and Carrots promptly. Mott said nothing, for, *of course*, the speech could not have been addressed to *him*. Mr. Maurice Desart, nearly thirteen years old, could not be supposed to be a companion to a mite of a girl of six.

"It won't be difficult to be quiet to-morrow morning," said Floss to Carrots, "for I expect I shall be very sleepy, as I have *quite* made up my

mind to stay awake to-night, till I hear them come."

It was then eight o'clock, and Floss was going to bed. Carrots had been in bed nearly an hour, but was not yet asleep. He soon dropped off, however, and how long do you think Floss kept awake? Till twenty-three minutes past eight, or not so late probably, for that was the time by the nursery clock, when nurse came in to see that her charges were tucked up for the night, and found them both fast asleep!

They were in a state of great expectation the next morning when they were being dressed, but they remembered their promise and were very quiet.

"When shall we see Sybil?" asked Carrots; "will she have breakfast in the nursery?"

"Of course not," said Floss, "she won't be up for ever so long, I dare say."

"Poor little thing, she must be very tired," said nurse.

"Did you see her last night?" asked Floss eagerly.

Nurse shook her head. "It was past ten when they arrived," she said, "the little lady was put to bed at once, your mamma and sisters only saw her for a minute."

So Floss and Carrots ate their bread and milk in undiminished curiosity. Not long afterwards the bell rang for prayers in the dining-room as usual, and the

two, hand in hand, went in to take their places among the others.

They were rather late, Captain Desart had the Prayer Book and Bible open before him, and was looking impatient, so Floss and Carrots sat down on their little chairs and left "good-mornings" till after prayers. There was a strange lady beside their mother, and, yes, beside the strange lady a strange little girl! Was *that* Sybil? Where was the fair-haired, blue-eyed, waxen, doll-like Sybil, they had expected to see?

What they did see was worth looking at, however. It was a very pretty Sybil after all. Small and dark, dark-eyed, dark-haired, and browny-red as to complexion, Sybil was more like a gipsy than an angel as they had fancied her. She had *very* pretty, very bright, noticing eyes, and she was pretty altogether. She was dressed in black velvet with a bright crimson sash, and her hair was tied with crimson ribbon; her neat little legs were clothed in black silk stockings, and there were buckles on her tiny shoes.

Floss and Carrots hardly dared to stare at her, for her eyes seemed to be noticing them all over, and when prayers were finished, and their mamma called them to come to speak to their aunt and cousin, do you know they actually both felt quite shy of Sybil, small as she was? More shy of her than of their aunt, somehow; *she* seemed more like what they had expected, or, perhaps, the truth was

they had "expected" much less about her. Besides no children ever were shy with auntie, such a thing would have been impossible.

They kissed Sybil, Floss feeling very tall and lanky beside her compact tiny cousin, and Carrots feeling I don't know how. He just looked at Sybil with his soft wondering brown eyes, in such a solemn way that at last she burst out laughing.

"What a funny boy you are!" she exclaimed. "Mother dear, *isn't* he a funny boy?"

"Aren't you very tired, Sybil?" said Floss, afraid that she would be laughed at as "a funny girl," next.

"No, thank you," said Sybil, quite grave, and like a grown-up person, all in a minute. "I'm becustomed to travelling. I'm not tired at all, but I'll tell you what I am — I'm," and out broke her merry laugh again, "I'm very *hungry*."

"That's a broad hint," said Captain Desart, laughing too. "Florence, your daughter is ready for breakfast, do you hear? Where will you sit, Miss Sybil? Beside your old uncle, eh?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Sybil, "if you won't call me Miss Sybil, please. And may this little boy sit 'aside me?"

"This little boy and this little girl have had their breakfast," said Mrs. Desart. "Run off, Carrots and Floss, you are both to have a whole holiday you know, so Sybil will see plenty of you."

"I wish they could see more of each other," said

auntie, as the children left the room. "Some time you must let them both come and pay us a long visit, when we are really settled you know."

Auntie gave a little sigh as she said this — she felt so tender and kind to Carrots and Floss, and something made her a little sorry for them. Though they were healthy, happy-looking children, and their dress was neat and cared for, they did not look like her Sybil, whose clothes were always like those of a little princess. Floss's frock was rather faded-looking, and there was a mark where it had been let down, and Carrots' brown holland blouse had arrived at a very *whitey*-brown shade, through much wear and washing.

"It must be hard work with so many children, and such small means," she thought to herself, for auntie had been married young to a rich man, and knew little of "making both ends meet," but aloud she only said, "how lovely little Fabian would look in black velvet, Lucy! What a complexion he has!"

"Yes, if you can forgive him his hair," said Mrs. Desart.

"I think his hair is beautiful," observed Sybil and then went on eating her breakfast.

They all laughed, but there was still a little sigh at the bottom of auntie's heart. There was reason for it greater than the sight of her little nephew's and niece's shabby clothes.

But there was no sigh in the hearts of Floss and Carrots.

"Carrots," said Floss, as they made their way to the nursery to decide which of their small collection of toys were fit for Sybil's inspection, "Carrots, *did* you hear."

"What auntie said?" asked Carrots. "Yes, I heard. Do you think mamma will ever let us go?"

"Some day, perhaps," said Floss, and oh what dreams and plans and fancies hung on that "perhaps!" "*Fancy*, Carrots, we should go in the railway, you and me, Carrots, alone perhaps."

"Oh, Floss!" said Carrots, his feelings being beyond further expression.

That "some day" was a good way off, however, but "to-day" was here, and a nice bright-looking to-day it was. How happy they were! How happy Sybil was!

For, somehow, though she was dressed like a princess, though since babyhood she had had *everything* a child could wish for, though very often, I must confess, she had had "her own way," a good deal more than would have been good for most children, little Sybil was not spoilt. The spoiling dropped off her like water down a duck's back, and auntie never found out it had been there at all! Perhaps after all there is a kind of spoiling that isn't spoiling—love and kindness, and even indulgence, do not spoil when there is perfect trust and openness, and when

a child at the same time is taught the one great lesson, that the best happiness is trying to make others happy too.

They played on the sands nearly all day, and Sybil, to her great delight, was covered up from damage by one of Carrots' blouses. The sun came out bright and warm, and they built the most lovely sand house you ever saw.

"I'd like to live in it always," said Carrots.

"Oh you funny boy," said Sybil patronisingly, "and what would you do at night, when it got cold, and perhaps the sea would come in."

"Perhaps the mermaids would take care of him till the morning," said Floss.

"What are the mermaids?" asked Sybil.

"Pretty ladies," said Carrots, "who live at the bottom of the sea, only they've got tails."

"Then they can't be pretty," said Sybil decidedly, "not unless their tails are beautiful and sweeping out, like peacocks! Are they? — one day I tied a shawl of mother's on, it was a red and gold shawl, and I sweeped it about just like a peacock, — that *would* be pretty."

"I don't think mermaids' tails are like that," said Carrots, doubtfully, "but they *are* pretty ladies, aren't they, Floss?"

"Beautiful," said Floss, "but they're very sad. They come up to the shore at night and comb their hair and cry dreadfully."

"What do they cry for?" asked Sybil and Carrots, pressing up to Floss, and forgetting all about the lovely sand house.

"Because they — no, you couldn't understand," she broke off; "it is no good telling you."

"Oh do tell," said the children.

"Well," said Floss, "I read in a book of Cecil's, they cry because they haven't got any souls. When they die they can't go to heaven, you see."

Sybil and Carrots looked very solemn at this. Then a sudden thought struck Carrots.

"How can they cry if they haven't got souls, Floss?" he said, "nurse says it's our souls that make us glad and sorry. Are you *sure* the poor mermaids haven't got souls?"

"I'm only telling you what I read in a book," said Floss. "I dare say it's all a sort of fairy tale. Don't you like fairy tales, Sybil?"

"No," said Sybil, "I like stories of naughty boys and girls best — *very* naughty boys and girls."

"Oh, Sybil!" said Carrots, "*I* don't, because they are always unhappy in the end."

"No, they're not. Sometimes they all get good. Mother always makes them get good at the end," replied Sybil.

"Does auntie tell you stories?" said Floss.

"Yes, of course, for I can't read them to myself yet. I'm learning, but it is *so* hard," said Sybil dolefully.

"I wish auntie would tell *us* stories."

"P'raps she will when you come to my house," said Sybil, encouragingly. "Would you think that a treat?"

"It would be a 'normous treat."

"We're going to have a treat to-day," said Floss. "We're going to have tea in the dining-room with you, Sybil, and auntie and everybody, and I think it's time to go in now, because we must change our frocks."

Carrots had never had tea in the dining-room before, and felt a little overpowered by the honour. He sat very still, and took whatever was offered to him, as nurse had taught him. Cecil poured out the tea, and to please the children she put an extra allowance of sugar into their cups. Carrots tasted his, and was just thinking how very nice it was, when it flashed across his mind that he should not have had any sugar. He put down his cup and looked round him in great perplexity. If only he could ask Floss. But Floss was at the other side of the table, she seemed to be drinking her tea without any misgiving. Wasn't it naughty? Could she have forgotten? Carrots grew more and more unhappy; the tears filled his eyes, and his face got scarlet.

"What's the matter, dear?" said auntie, who was sitting next him, "is your tea too hot? Has it scalded your poor little mouth?"

She said it in a low voice. She was so kind and "understanding," she knew Carrots would not have liked everybody round the table to begin noticing him, and as she looked at him more closely, she saw that the tears in his eyes were those of distress, not of "scalding."

"No, thank you," said Carrots, looking up in auntie's face in his perplexity; "it isn't that. My tea is *werry* good, but it's got sugar in."

"And you don't like sugar? Poor old man! Never mind, Cecil will give you another cup. You're not like Sybil in your tastes," said auntie, kindly, and she turned to ask Cecil for some sugarless tea for her little brother.

"No, no, auntie. Oh, *please* don't," whispered Carrots, his trouble increasing, and pulling hard at his aunt's sleeve as he spoke, "I *do* like sugar werry much — it isn't that. But mamma said I was never, *never* to take nucken that wasn't mine, and sugar won't be mine for two weeks more, nurse says."

Auntie stared at her little nephew in blank bewilderment. What *did* he mean? Even her quick wits were quite at fault.

"What *do* you mean, my dear little boy?" she said.

Suddenly a new complication struck poor Carrots.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "it's a secret, it's a secret, and I'm telling it," and he burst into tears.

It was impossible now to hide his trouble. Everybody began to cross-question him.

"WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT, MY POOR OLD MAN?" SAID AUNTIE, FONDLY. — p. 103.

"Cry-baby," muttered Maurice, and even Mrs. Desart said, "Carrots, I wonder at your behaving so when your aunt and cousin are here. Floss, do you know what is the matter with him?"

"No, mamma," said Floss, looking as she always did when Carrots was in distress, ready to cry herself.

"Carrots," said Captain Desart, sharply, "go to the nursery till you learn to behave properly."

Carrots got slowly down off his high chair, and crept away. But everybody looked troubled and uncomfortable.

Auntie hated to see people looking troubled and uncomfortable. She thought a minute, and then she turned to Mrs. Desart.

"Lucy," she said, "will you let me try what I can do with the poor little fellow? I am sure it was not naughtiness made him cry."

And almost before Mrs. Desart could reply, auntie was off to the nursery in search of Carrots.

He had left off crying, and was sitting quietly by the window, looking out at his old friend the sea.

"What are you thinking about, my poor old man?" said auntie, fondly.

Carrots looked up at her. "I like you to call me that," he said. "I was thinking about our hoops and what a long time four weeks is."

"Has that to do with you having no sugar?" asked auntie.

"Yes," said Carrots. "How *did* you guess? You're like a fairy, auntie." But then his face grew troubled again. "I forgot," he went on, "it's a secret. It's Floss's secret too. I would so like to tell you, for I don't know what to do. I don't mind having no tea, but they all thought I was naughty."

"Wait a minute," said auntie. She hurried out of the room, but was back in a minute.

"I've asked Floss," she said, "and she gives you leave to tell me. So now, perhaps, when I know all about it, I can tell you what to do."

The telling did not take Carrots long; he was so glad to show auntie he had not meant to be naughty. Auntie listened quite gravely, and when he had finished she said she thought he was quite right not to take any sugar.

"But do you think Floss did?" said Carrots, anxiously.

"Perhaps having tea in the dining-room made her forget," said auntie. "We'll ask her afterwards, and if she did forget, I'll tell you what she must do. She must go without one day longer than you. Now come along with me, and I'll make it all right, you'll see."

When they got back to the dining-room auntie quietly lifted Carrots on to his chair again, and said to his mamma with a smile, "It was all a mistake; I thought it was; Carrots was not naughty at all, and he is quite happy again now."

And Mrs. Desart smiled too, so Carrots really did feel happy again. But he wondered what auntie would do about the tea, which was still standing there as he had left it, and it would be wrong to "waste" it, thought Carrots.

Sybil was sitting on auntie's other side, and auntie glancing at her cup saw that it was empty. So auntie quietly put Carrots' cup before Sybil and gave Carrots the empty one.

"Cecil," she said, "will you give Carrots some tea without any sugar?"

Cecil saw that auntie had some reason for asking this, so she gave Carrots the tea as auntie said, and Carrots drank it and ate his bread and butter and a piece of cake, with great content.

The only person who did not seem *quite* contented was Sybil.

"Mother," she whispered, "I don't like having Carrots' tea. It's quite cold."

But as Carrots didn't hear it, it didn't much matter. For you see, Sybil had had one cup of nice hot tea, so she was not so badly off after all.

And, alas! the very next morning auntie and Sybil had to go away. And the long talked-of and fancied-about visit was over.

CHAPTER X.

A JOURNEY AND ITS ENDING.

"The way was long, the wind was cold."

Soon after auntie's visit summer really began to come. It was very pleasant while it lasted, but this year it was a very short summer, and the winter that came after was a very severe one, and made many people ill. It did not make Carrots ill, nor Floss, nor any of the Desart children, for they were all strong, but it was very bad for their mother. As the winter went on, she seemed to get weaker and weaker; there were very few days on which she could go out, and if the spring had not been an early and very mild one, I hardly think her strength would have lasted.

But with the finer weather she seemed to get better again. The children were of course very glad, but still they had not felt frightened by her illness. It had come on so slowly and gradually that they had got accustomed to it, as children do. They thought it was just the cold wintry weather that had made her ill, and that when the spring came she would get better. And when the spring came and

she *did* get better, they were perfectly satisfied and happy.

By the end of *this* summer Carrots was seven years old — no longer in the least a baby, though he was not tall for his age. He could read, of course, perfectly, and write a little. Now and then he wrote little letters to Sybil in answer to hers, for she was very particular about getting answers. She was only just beginning to learn to write, and sometimes when she got tired of working away at real "A's" and "B's" and "C's" in her letters, she would dash off into a lot of "scribble," which she said was "children's writing," and "if Carrots didn't know what it meant he must be very stupid, as he was a child too."

Carrots *didn't* know what it meant, but he never liked to say so, and I dare say it did not much matter. But *his* letters to Sybil were quite real. Any one could have understood them.

Long ago Floss and he had bought their hoops. They were quite "old friends" now. They had bought them at the toy-shop, just as they had planned, and, curiously enough when their mamma and nurse counted up how much was owing to them for the sugar, it came to *exactly* the price of the hoops.

But I must tell you what happened just about the time Carrots had his seventh birthday. The summer was nearly over again, and already the cold winds, of which there were so many at Sandyshore, were beginning to be felt. Floss noticed that her mother very

seldom went out now, and even in the house she generally had to wrap herself up in a shawl.

"Mamma, I hope the cold weather isn't going to make you ill again?" Floss said, one day when she and Carrots came in from a race on the sands, all hot and rosy with running.

"I don't know, dear," said her mother with a little sigh.

"I wish you could run about like us. That would make you *so* hot," said Carrots.

Mrs. Desart smiled. Just then her glance happened to fall on Floss's boots. "My dear child," she said, "those boots are really not fit to go out with. There's a great hole at the side of one of them."

"I know, mamma," said Floss, "but they're going to be mended. Nurse thinks they'll do a good while longer, if they're mended. I hope they will, for I know you always have so many new things to get when winter begins to come — haven't you, mamma?"

Mrs. Desart sighed again.

"I should have liked all your things to be so nice," she said, more as if speaking to herself than to Floss, "but it can't be helped."

Something in her tone caught Floss's attention.

"Why, mamma?" she asked, "why did you want our things to be so nice?"

"Because, dears, you may be going away from home," replied Mrs. Desart.

Floss and Carrots stared with astonishment. "Go-

ing away from home," Floss repeated, utterly unable to say more. Carrots could say nothing at all, he could *only* stare.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Desart, "I had meant to tell you all about it before, but I have kept putting it off — " she stopped and seemed to hesitate.

"Why, mamma?" said Floss again. "Don't you like us to go? Are you coming with us, mamma?"

"Are we going to auntie's?" said Carrots.

His asking this seemed to please his mother.

"You would like to go to auntie's, wouldn't you, Carrots?" she said.

Carrots stroked his mother's shawl up and down two or three times before he answered.

"I'd like to go if you would come too," he said at last, "but I think I would rather stay at home, thank you, if you can't come."

Mrs. Desart's eyes filled with tears. "Poor little Carrots!" she said, softly smoothing his curls with her hand. "But if it would please me for Floss and you to go without me?" she said.

"I'll go if you want me to go, mamma," said Carrots.

"I must explain a little," said Mrs. Desart, and then she went on to tell the children how it was. The doctor had said she must not risk another winter at Sandyshore, and it had been arranged for her to go to a warmer climate. Cecil and Louise were to go with her; Captain Desart would be with them as

much as he possibly could, and Maurice was to live at school. And what concerned the two little ones almost more than anything, *nurse* was to go too! "I must have some one kind and sensible with me, in case, in case —" and again Mrs. Desart hesitated.

"In case you were very tired with travelling, or if you were to get a bad cold again; somebody who could make nice white wine whey and things like that," said Floss, who was of a practical turn of mind, "oh yes, mamma, I quite understand."

"Though nurse is getting old, she has been so much accustomed to travelling, too," said Mrs. Desart, "and we are going a long way — to Algeria; Floss, do you know where that is?"

"Over the sea!" said Floss, "I wish we might come too, mamma, Carrots and I," she exclaimed. "You will be *so* far away."

"But you will be with auntie, and you know how kind auntie is," said her mother, forcing herself to speak cheerfully. "And it is such a pretty place where auntie lives."

"Is the sea there?" said Carrots.

"No, but the hills are," answered Mrs. Desart with a smile. "I am quite sure you will like it." And she went on to tell them so much about auntie's pretty home that for a little they almost forgot everything but the pleasant part of the change that was to come so soon.

And it did come very soon. It seemed but a few

days from the afternoon they had first heard about it all, when Floss and Carrots found themselves early one morning at the little railway station with their father, waiting for the train.

Captain Desart was to travel with them for the first hour, to take them to the "junction" where they were to change and get into a train which would take them straight to Whitefriars, near which was auntie's house.

You will laugh, children, I dare say, and think Floss and Carrots very countrified and ignorant when I tell you that they had never been a long railway journey before. Never, that is to say, that they could *remember* — for their parents had come to Sandyshore when Floss was a baby, and Carrots, as you know, had been born there.

So you can hardly fancy what a wonderful event this journey was to them.

Their little hearts were very full at first after parting with their mother, and sisters, and nurse, and all that made the Cove House home to them.

And their mamma had kissed them so *many* times, as if she could not really say good-bye, though she was not generally a very petting or kissing mamma, but rather quiet and grave.

And nurse had the tears in her eyes, and Louise had them pouring down her face, and Cecil had *her* face squeezed up in a sort of way that Floss knew meant she was determined she would not cry. Floss felt

troubled in a way she could not understand, and I think Carrots did too. They had a feeling that the bigger people knew of more reason for sorrow than had been told to them, and yet they could not imagine what it could be. And after all, to *them* the parting for even four or five months was almost as great a trouble as they could understand! only they were going to "auntie's"!

"And we will try to be so good, dear mamma," said Floss, bravely choking down her tears. "We will try to get on with our lessons, too, and write you nice letters. And — and —" here a sob or two *would* make its way, "I can't help crying a little; but I'm sure we shall be very happy, won't we, Carrots?"

"If mamma wants us to be happy, we'll *try*, won't we, Floss?" said Carrots. He wiped the tears on his mother's cheeks with his own little pocket-handkerchief and looked up in her face piteously. "Please don't cry, poor mamma," he said; "we *will* be good and happy."

Then their father came in and hurried them off, and the farewells were over — that part of them, at least, for the saying good-bye to Captain Desart at the junction was rather hard too.

And at last Floss and Carrots find themselves at the height of their ambition — alone in a railway carriage travelling to auntie's! But they do not seem so delighted as they used to fancy they would;

they do not jump about and laugh and chatter in their overflowing pleasure — they sit quite still, side by side, holding each other's hands and with little quiet grave faces.

"Things never come the same as people fancy," said Floss at last. "We never thought we should go to auntie's because poor mamma was ill, did we, Carrots?"

"No, we never did," said Carrots. "But mamma will soon get better, won't she, Floss, at that nice warm place?"

"Oh yes, of course she will," said Floss. "But it's a long way away, Carrots, and I never thought going to auntie's would be like this."

"No," agreed Carrots again, "we never did."

"I'm so sorry to leave them all, aren't you, Carrots?" said Floss, her voice trembling a little.

"Yes," said Carrots; "and, Floss, I'm very sorry, too, to leave the sea. I never left the sea before, you know."

"But the *sea* won't miss you," said Floss, "and poor mamma and nursie and all of them *will* miss us. That's what I keep thinking of."

"When should we eat our dinner, Floss?" said Carrots, with an instinct that it would be as well to change the subject.

"Not just yet. When we've gone about half-way would do; and papa said that great big place, Millingham, would be about half-way."

"But if there were any other people to get into the carriage?" said Carrots.

"Well, it wouldn't matter," said Floss. "People must eat when they are travelling."

"But wouldn't we have to ask them to have some too?" suggested Carrots.

"I don't know," said Floss; "I never thought of that. Perhaps it *would* be polite. But there are only eight sandwiches, Carrots; eight sandwiches and four sponge cakes and a packet of Albert biscuits. I hope a great many people won't get in."

No one got in at the next station. Only the guard put his head in at the door, as Captain Desart had asked him to do, to see how the little pair were getting on. Carrots had thoughts of offering *him* a sandwich, but he disappeared before there was time to do so, which Floss thought very fortunate when she heard of Carrots' intention. "For you see," she said, "if we began offering them to him, we would have to do it at every station, and if there are eight stations before Whitefriars, all our sandwiches would be gone."

"He might have a biscuit for a change," said Carrots, submissive, but scarcely convinced. "He is a nice man, Floss — he calls us 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss.' Do you think papa told him to say 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss'?"

But before Floss had time to answer they had

stopped again, and this time some one did get into their carriage. The new-comer was a small, neat, oldish lady. She looked rather grim at first, but after a while she grew decidedly friendly, and no wonder; for at Millingham, Floss and Carrots unpacked their little basket of provisions, and I don't think the grimmest of maiden ladies could have remained grim after the politeness with which the children treated her.

They selected the nicest-looking sandwich, putting it on an Albert biscuit by way of a plate, and then, at a sign from Floss, Carrots clambered down from his seat and gravely offered it to the lady.

"I'm sorry there's no mustard, if you like mustard," said Floss; "but Carrots and I don't like it, and — and — I suppose nurse didn't think of any one else."

The oldish lady looked at the children for a moment before she replied.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said at last, "but I think I won't take a sandwich, as I had luncheon before I left home. But if you will allow me I will have a biscuit. I am very fond of biscuits."

"I'm so glad," said Floss, hospitably. "Now, Carrots," she said in a lower voice, "you eat two sandwiches and I'll eat two, and we'll each have one sponge cake. And that'll do for dinner. We'll eat the rest in about an hour and pretend we're having tea early."

The lady asked them a good many questions after this, and told them they were such well-behaved children, she would not mind travelling all the way to Whitefriars with them. Floss blushed a little at this; it made her feel shy to be praised to her face, but still no doubt the lady meant it kindly, and they were rather sorry when she left them, some stations before they got to Whitefriars. Their old friend the guard left them here, too, but he popped his head in for the last time to say that he was going to speak for them to "him that was coming on now." And Floss thanked him, though she had not the least idea what he meant.

But there must have been some mistake about it, for the new guard never came near them, and when, at the last stoppage before Whitefriars, another man threw the door open and demanded "tickets," Floss felt too startled by his rough manner to ask him what they were longing to know, how far they still had to go. But he took away the tickets. "So we can't have very far to go," said Floss. "Papa said they would take away the tickets a little before we got to Whitefriars."

"Will auntie be at the station?" said Carrots.

"Yes, I'm sure she will," said Floss. "Auntie and Sybil too, perhaps. Carrots, I do believe we're there; the train's stopping."

And in another minute they found themselves

in a nice clean-looking station with several people standing about on the platform, evidently waiting for the train.

The children looked out eagerly. There were two or three ladies, one little girl, and a few other people — but no auntie, no Sybil!

"P'raps this isn't the place," said Carrots.

"Please, is this Whitefriars?" inquired Floss of a porter who just then threw open the door.

"Whitefriars, yes, miss. Any lugguge?"

"Oh yes," said Floss anxiously, "a great deal. It's in one of the luggage carriages, and it's marked with our name."

The man smiled. "Will you come with me, missie, and show me which it is, and I'll get it all right for you."

"Oh, thank you," said Floss, gathering together their cloaks and baskets, and preparing to descend.

"What a *kind* man," whispered Carrots; and when the porter lifted him out of the carriage he took hold of his hand and ran along beside him as fast as his little legs could keep up.

Floss felt quite bewildered at first, when she saw the heaps and heaps of luggage lying on the platform, all labelled "Whitefriars." It seemed to her that everybody must have been travelling to Whitefriars to-day! But by degrees it was claimed and melted away, and the kind porter, to whom

she had already pointed out their "great deal"—one portmanteau, one bag, and a small tin hat-box—soon picked it up and stood waiting for further orders.

"Where am I to take it to, please, miss?" he said. "Is there no one here to meet you?"

"I don't think so, I don't know what to do," said Floss, looking sadly troubled again. In the excitement of finding the luggage she had forgotten this new difficulty, but now it returned in full force.

"Have you far to go?" said the man.

"Oh no," said Floss, "auntie's house is near here, I know."

"Then perhaps little master and you had better walk on, and send for the luggage afterwards?" suggested the man, never doubting from Floss's manner that the children were accustomed to the place, and knew their way.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Floss uncertainly.

"Or shall I fetch you a fly from the *Blue Boar?*" said the man. "The station flies has all drove off."

"No, thank you; I don't think I have enough money for that," said Floss, feeling in her pocket for her purse, which she knew contained only her father's parting gift of half-a-crown, a sixpence with a hole in it, and three pennies of Carrots'! "Your auntie says she will get you *everything* you

want, so I need not give you any money with you," their mother had said. Floss had no idea what a fly from the *Blue Boar* would cost, but it *sounded* very grand, and she hardly dared to risk it.

"Well, I dare say you'll be safest to walk," said the porter, rather afraid of getting himself into a scrape if he fetched the children a fly without proper authority, and feeling uncertain, from their very plain and rather "countrified" appearance, if their friends belonged to the fly patronising class or not. "I'll keep the luggage safe till it's sent for — no fear," and with a friendly nod he marched off with their possessions.

Holding Carrots by the hand, Floss made her way out of the station. For about a quarter of a mile the road ran straight before them and they trudged along contentedly enough. But after awhile they came to a point where two roads met, one leading to the little watering-place (for the station was some way from the town), the other out into the country. And for the first time it struck Floss that she did not know the way. She looked about her in perplexity.

"It cannot be far," she said; "mamma always said auntie lived *near* Whitefriars. But I wish I knew which way to go."

Carrots had no suggestion to offer. To make matters worse, it began to rain — a cold, sleety, late

October rain; the children had no umbrella, and were already tired and hungry. I think it was much to their credit that they did not lose heart altogether.

Just as Floss was making up her mind to take the turn leading in the distance to terraces of houses and gardens and other signs of civilisation, there came, jogging along the road on a cart-horse, a farmer's boy. Joyful sight! Floss plucked up heart.

"Can you tell me, please," she called out, "which is the way to Greenmays?"

The farmer's boy turned his thumb in the direction of the country road. "Yonder," he shouted, without stopping in his jog, "straight on past the church, and down lane to left."

"Is it far?" asked Floss, but the boy did not seem to hear.

There was nothing for it but to go on with their trudge. The rain was not heavy but very piercingly cold, and the daylight was beginning to fade. Two or three hot tears at last forced their way down Floss's cheeks, but she wiped them quickly away, before Carrots could see them. Carrots said nothing, but Floss knew he was getting tired by the way he kept lagging behind, every now and then giving a little run to get up to Floss again.

"I shouldn't mind so much, Floss," he said at last, "if it would be home when we get there, and if we were to find mamma and nurse and tea in our own nursery waiting for us."

This was altogether too much for Floss. For a moment or two she could not speak, she was choked with sobs. "Oh, how I do wish poor mamma hadn't got ill," she said at last.

"Poor Flossie, dear Flossie," said Carrots, pulling down her face to kiss in spite of the rain and the dark and the cold and everything. "I didn't mean to make you cry. And auntie will be very kind when we get there, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh yes," said Floss, trying to speak cheerfully, though in her secret heart there was a little misgiving. It did not look very kind not to have sent to meet them at the station, and even without this, Floss, though she had not said so, had felt a little shy and frightened at the thought of meeting auntie and the strange uncle, and even Sybil again. It was nearly two years since the visit to Sandyshore, and two years is a lifetime to a child—it seemed to Floss like going altogether among strangers. She clasped her little brother's hand tighter as these feelings passed through her mind. "It won't be so bad for Carrots," she reflected; "anyway he will have me."

They seemed to have walked a very weary way when at last the church, of which the farmer's boy had spoken, came in sight—very dimly in sight, for the daylight was fast dying away. Floss would have passed the church without noticing it, but the road divided in two just at this place, and she was obliged

to think which way to go. Then the boy's directions came into her mind.

"To the left past the church, didn't he say, Carrots?" she said.

"'Down lane to left,' he said," replied Carrots.

"Then it *must* be this way," said Floss, and on they trudged.

In a few minutes they came to large gates, on one side of which stood a pretty little house; but such a little house, hardly bigger than a cottage.

"Is that auntie's house?" said Carrots.

"I'm afraid it's too little to be auntie's house," said Floss. "I wish it was. I would *much* rather auntie lived in a cottage."

"Just like Mrs. White's," said Carrots.

Floss could not help laughing at him; it had left off raining and her spirits were rising a little.

"Look, Carrots," she said, "there is a light in the cottage window. We'd better knock at the door and ask if it is auntie's house. It's getting rather like a fairy story, isn't it, Carrots? Fancy if somebody calls out 'Pull the string and the latch will open.'"

"But that would be the wolf, Floss," said Carrots, pressing closer to his sister.

It was no wolf, but a nice, tidy-looking woman with a white cap and a baby in her arms who opened the door, and stood staring at the two little wayfarers in bewilderment. Floss grew afraid that she was angry.

"I'm very sorry — I mean I beg your pardon," she began. "I didn't know this was your house. We thought perhaps it was auntie's. Can you tell me, please, where Greenmays is?"

"This *is* Greenmays," said the woman. Floss stared: the door opened right into the kitchen, it couldn't be auntie's house.

"This is the lodge," continued the woman. "If it's some one at the big house you're wanting, you must just go straight up the drive. I'd show you the way," she went on, "but my husband's up at the stables and it's too cold for baby. You seem wet and tired, you do — have you come far?"

"Yes," said Floss, wearily, "*very* far. We thought auntie would meet us at the station, but there wasn't anybody."

"They must be kin to the housekeeper, surely," thought the woman. And yet something indescribable in Floss's manner, and in the clear, well-bred tones of her small, childish voice, prevented her asking if this was so. "I wish I could go with you to the house," she repeated, curiosity and kindliness alike prompting her, "but," she added, looking doubtfully at the sleeping child in her arms, "I'm afeared for baby."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, thank you," said Floss, "we can find the way, I dare say. Good-evening," and taking Carrots by the hand, she turned to go.

"Good-evening," said little Carrots also.

"Good-evening, and I hope you'll find your auntie in," said the woman. And for a few minutes she stood at the door straining her eyes after the two forlorn little figures till she could distinguish them no longer in the darkness of the trees bordering the avenue. "Who can they be?" she said to herself. "Such a pretty spoken, old-fashioned little pair I never did see!"

CHAPTER XI.

HAPPY AND SAD.

"'Tis gone — and in a merry fit
They run upstairs in gamesome race.
* * * * * *
A moment's heaviness they feel,
A sadness at the heart."

THE MOTHER'S RETURN.

IT was very dark in the drive, and Carrots crept close to Floss. But Floss felt far less afraid of the dark than of the light! when at last the house came in view and the brightly lit up windows shone out into the gloom.

"Oh, what a big house," said Floss. "Oh Carrots, how I do wish that little cottage had been auntie's house, even though the door did open right into the kitchen. Don't you, Carrots?"

"I don't know," replied Carrots, "auntie will be very kind to us, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh yes," said Floss, "but supposing she is having a party to-night, Carrots?"

"Well, we could have tea in the nursery, and go to bed," said Carrots philosophically. "Oh Floss, *wouldn't* you like some nice hot tea and bread and butter?"

"Poor Carrots," said Floss. And her anxiety to see her little brother in comfort again gave her courage to ring the bell as loudly as she could.

A man servant opened the door. Very tall and formidable he looked to the two children, whose eyes were dazzled by the sudden light, after their long walk in the dusk.

"If you please," said Floss, "is auntie at home?"

The man stared. "*What* did you say?" he inquired. "Is it a message from some one?"

"Oh no," said Floss, "it's just that we've come, Carrots and I — will you please tell auntie? We've walked all the way from the station, because there was no one to meet us."

The man still stared. He had heard something about a young lady and gentleman, his mistress's nephew and niece, being expected on a visit, but his ideas were rather slow. He could not all at once take in that the dilapidated little couple before him could possibly be the looked for guests.

But just then another person came upon the scene. A little figure with bright dark eyes and flying hair came dancing into the hall.

"Who's there, Fletcher?" she said. "Is it the post?"

"No, miss," said Fletcher, rather glad of some one to consult in his perplexity. "I don't know

"It is Flossie and me, Sybil — don't you remember us?" — p. 127.

who it is — that's to say, it's a little boy and girl who say as they've come from the station, but I can't justly make out who it is they want."

"How funny," said Sybil, coming forward and peering our from under Fletcher's arm, "perhaps they'll tell *me* what they want. Who are you, little girl? Is it my mother you want? Will you give me your message?"

She looked more like a little princess than ever. She was dressed to go down to the drawing-room before dinner — all white embroidery and lace and rose-coloured ribbons. Floss and Carrots looked at her with a sort of dazzled admiration, mingled with shy bewilderment. It all seemed more of a mistake than ever — Sybil was evidently not expecting them — if only the railway station had not been so dreadfully far away, Floss felt as if she would have liked to take Carrots by the hand and go away back again, all the long weary way to Sandyshore!

But *Carrots'* faith in auntie and Sybil was unshaken — and his childlike confidence less susceptible of chill. Partly from mortification, partly to hide that she was crying, Floss stood perfectly silent, but Carrots pressed forward.

"It is Flossie and me, Sybil — don't you remember us? We've walked *such* a long way, and there was nobody to meet us at the station, and we are *so* cold and so hungry!"

Sybil gave a sort of leap into the air. "Floss and Carrots!" she cried, "oh mother, mother, come quick, here are Floss and Carrots!"

She seemed to fly across the hall in one second, and darting down a passage disappeared, crying out all the way, "Flossie and Carrots — oh mother, mother, come."

And before the children had time to consider what they had best do, and *long* before the very deliberate Mr. Fletcher had collected his wits sufficiently to decide upon inviting them to come in, Sybil was back again, closely followed by her mother, whom she had dragged out of the drawing-room without any other explanation than her cry of "Floss and Carrots, oh mother, Flossie and Carrots."

And when Floss saw auntie running to them, with her kind face all eagerness and anxiety, the shyness and the disappointment and the mortification all seemed suddenly to melt away. She rushed into the hall and threw herself sobbing into auntie's arms. "Oh auntie," she cried, "we are so tired — poor Carrots is I mean, and so hungry, and I thought you had forgotten us, and we're so far away from mamma."

Auntie understood all about it in a moment. She hugged Floss tight, and only let go of her for an instant to get hold of Carrots and hug him tight too. And then, when she saw the two tired little white faces, and felt how wet they were, and saw the tears

on Floss's cheeks, she sat down on the hall floor, still clasping them tight, and actually cried too.

"My two poor dear little babes in the wood," she exclaimed. "What a dreadful mistake! What a cruel auntie you must have thought me!"

"I didn't know if you wanted us — I thought perhaps you had forgotten about us coming," whispered Floss.

"No wonder," said auntie; "but Flossie, darling, I haven't got any letter to say what day you were coming. That was why we were not at the station. Sybil and I had been making such delightful plans about how we should meet you at the station — do you think your father and mother could have forgotten to write to tell me the day?"

"Oh no," said Floss, "I know papa wrote to tell you — he wrote the day before yesterday, for I heard him tell mamma so. And this morning when the post came, just as we were leaving, he wondered a little that there was no letter from you, but he said perhaps you hadn't thought it worth while to write, as you had said any day this week would do for us to come."

"Of course I would have written," said auntie; "but what can have become of the letter?"

It had evidently gone astray somehow, and that very evening the mystery was explained, for the postman brought it — a very travel-worn letter indeed, with two or three scrawls across it in red ink

— "Missent to Whitehurst," "Try Whitefield," etc., etc.

"Whenever a letter does go wrong, which certainly is not very often, it is sure to be one of consequence," said auntie. But long before the letter came Floss and Carrots had forgotten their troubles — at least if they hadn't it was not auntie's fault, for I can't tell you how kind she was and what a fuss she made about them. She took them up to Sybil's nice beautiful warm nursery, and all their wet things were taken off, and Floss was wrapped up in a dressing-gown of auntie's and Carrots in one of Sybil's, and then they had the most *lovely* tea you can imagine.

Sybil's father was away that night and was not coming back till the next day, and auntie was to have dinner alone, with Sybil beside her, you may be sure, to "keep her company," and help her to get through dinner by opening her little mouth for "tastes" every now and then. But auntie had to manage alone, after all, for of course Sybil would not leave Floss and Carrots, and auntie sent up the very nicest things from the dining-table for the children to eat with their tea, and Sybil did get some "tastes," I can assure you.

And they laughed at each other in the dressing-gowns, and Floss quite forgot that she had expected to feel shy and strange. Only when auntie came up to the nursery again after dinner and made Floss tell her all about the long walk in the cold and the dark,

and about the "kind porter," and the oldish-looking lady, and, further back still, about the leaving home in the morning and how poor mamma kissed them "so many, many times" — Floss could not help crying again a little, nor could auntie either. And though Carrots and Sybil did not cry, their little faces looked very solemn and as if they almost thought they *should* cry, as they sat side by side on the rug in front of the high nursery guard, Carrots in the funny red-flannel dressing-gown which made him look so "old fashioned," and Sybil in her white embroidery and rose ribbons, crumpling them all up "anyhow" in a way which really went to Floss's heart, though auntie did not seem to mind.

Then came bed-time. Such a nice bed-time, for auntie had prepared for them two dear little rooms, with a door between, that they should not feel far away from each other. And though it was the very first time in Carrots' life that he had gone to bed without kind old nurse to tuck him up, he did not feel unhappy, for Floss reminded him what a good thing it was that their mother had nurse with her now she was ill, and besides, Sybil's French maid Denise was *very* kind and merry, and not at all "stuck up" or grand.

And the waking the next morning!

Who does not know those first wakings in a strange place! Sometimes so pleasant, sometimes *so* sad, but never, I think, without a strange interestingness of

their own. This waking was pleasant, though so strange. The sun was shining for one thing — a great thing, I think I should call it, and the children felt it to be so.

They woke about the same time and called out to each other, and then Floss got out of bed and went to see how Carrots was looking, after all his adventures.

"You haven't caught cold I hope, Carrots," she said in a motherly tone.

"Oh no. I'm *quite* well," replied Carrots, "I haven't even a cold in my nose. And isn't it a nice morning, Floss, and isn't this a *lovely* room?"

"Yes," said Floss, "and so is mine, Carrots."

"And auntie *is* kind, isn't she, Floss?"

"Oh, *very*," said Floss.

"Isn't it nice to see the sun?" said Carrots. "Floss, I can't understand how it can always be the same sun, however far we go."

"But don't you remember what I showed you," said Floss, "about the world being like a little ball, always going round and round a great light, so *of course* the great light must always be the same?"

"Yes," said Carrots dreamily, "but still it seems funny. Will mamma see the sun at that nice warm place over the sea?"

"Why of course," said Floss, "it's the sun that makes that place nice and warm."

"*Is* it?" said Carrots. "Is that place nearer the sun than Sandyshore is, Floss?"

"No, not exactly. At least it is in a sort of a way — the sunshine falls straighter on it, but I couldn't explain without a globe and a lot of fuss," said Floss. "Never mind just now, Carrots — perhaps auntie can show you."

"But Floss," persisted Carrots, "I do want to know one thing. Shall we see the sun in heaven?"

"No," said Floss decidedly, "*certainly* not. It says in the Bible there will be no sun or moon in heaven."

"Then I don't think I shall like it at all," said Carrots, "for there won't be any sea there either. I can't think *how* it can be a nice place."

"But, Carrots dear," said Floss in some distress, "you mustn't think of heaven that way. It isn't like that. Heaven isn't like a place exactly, mamma says. It is just being *quite* good."

"Being *quite* good," repeated Carrots thoughtfully. "I wish I could be quite good, Floss, I wish everybody could, don't you?"

"Yes," said Floss. "But really you must get up, Carrots dear; that will be good for just now. Being good always comes in little bits like that."

"But in heaven, the being good will be all in one great big piece, that's how it will be, isn't it?" said Carrots, as he got out of bed and began hunting for his slippers.

I cannot tell you half the history of that first day at Greenmays, or of many others that followed. They

were very happy days, and they were full of so many new pleasures and interests for Carrots and Floss that I should really have to write another book to tell you all about them. Everybody was kind to the children, and everything that could be thought of to make them feel "at home" was done. And Greenmays was such a pretty place — Carrots could hardly miss his dear old sea, once he had learnt to make friends with the hills. At first he could do nothing but gaze at them in astonishment.

"I didn't think hills were so big, or that they would have so many faces," he said to Floss and Sybil the first morning when they were out in the garden together.

Sybil burst out laughing. "Oh you funny Carrots!" she said; "you're just like a boy in a fairy story — you've got such queer fancies."

"But they're *not* fancies, Sybil," said Carrots, gravely, turning his great brown eyes on his cousin. "The hills *have* got lots of different faces: that one up there, the one with the round knobby top, has looked *quite* different several times this morning. First it looked smiley and smooth, and then it got all cross and wrinkly, and *now* it looks as if it was going to sleep."

Sybil stared up at the hill he was pointing to. "I see what you mean," she said; "but it's only the shadows of the clouds."

"That's pretty," said Carrots: "who told you

that, Sybil? I never thought of clouds having shadows."

"Nobody told me," said Sybil; "I finded it out my own self. I find out lots of things," she continued, importantly. "I dare say it's because of my name — papa says my name means I *should* find out things, like a sort of a fairy, you know."

"Does it?" said Carrots, in a rather awe-struck tone. "I should like that. When you were little, Sybil," he continued, "were you ever frightened of shadows? *I* was."

"No," said Sybil, "I only thought they were funny. And once papa told me a story of a shadow that ran away from its master. It went across the street, at night, you know, when the lamps were lighted: there were houses opposite, you see, and the shadow went into such a beautiful house, and wouldn't come back again!"

"And what after that?" said both Floss and Carrots in a breath.

"Oh, I can't tell it you all," said Sybil; "you must ask papa."

"Does he often tell you stories?" asked Floss.

"Bits," said Sybil; "he doesn't tell them all through, like mother. But he's very nice about answering things I ask him. He doesn't say 'you couldn't understand,' or 'you'll know when you're older,' that *horrid* way."

"He must be nice," said Floss, who had secretly

been trembling a little at the thought of the strange uncle.

And he did turn out *very* nice. He was older than Floss had expected; a good deal older than auntie, whom he sometimes spoke to as if she were quite a little girl, in a way which amused the children very much. At first he seemed very quiet and grave, but after a while Floss found out that in his own way he was very fond of fun, and she confided to auntie that she thought he was the funniest person she had ever seen. I don't know if auntie told him this, or if he took it as a compliment, but certainly he could not have been offended, for every day, as they learnt to know him better, the children found him kinder and kinder.

So they were very happy at Greenmays, and no doubt would have gone on being so but for one thing. There came bad news of their mother.

This was how they heard it. Every week at least, for several weeks, Floss or Carrots, and sometimes both, got a letter from their mother or from Cecil and Louise; and at first these letters were so cheerful, that even the little bit of anxiety which the children had hardly known was in their hearts melted away.

"What a *good* thing mamma went to that nice warm place, isn't it, auntie?" Carrots used to say after the arrival of each letter, and auntie most heartily agreed with the happy little fellow. But

at last, just about Christmas time, when the thin foreign-looking letter, that the children had learnt to know so well, made its appearance one morning on the breakfast-table, it proved to be for auntie — *that*, of course, they did not object to, had there been one for them too, but there was not!

"Auntie dear, there is no letter for us," said Floss, when auntie came into the room. "Will you please open yours quick, and see if there is one inside it?"

"I don't think there is," said auntie; "it doesn't feel like it."

However, she opened the letter at once. No, there was no enclosure; and Floss, who was watching her face, saw that it grew troubled as she ran her eyes down the page.

"My letter is from your father. I cannot read it properly till after breakfast, for uncle is waiting for me to pour out his coffee. Run off now, dears, and I'll come to the nursery and tell you all about it after breakfast," she said, trying to look and speak just the same as usual.

But Floss saw that she was *trying;* she did not persist, however, but took Carrots by the hand, and went off obediently without speaking, only giving auntie one wistful look as she turned away.

"What's wrong, Florence?" said Sybil's father, as the door closed after the children.

"It is about Lucy," said auntie; "she is much worse; *very* ill indeed. She has caught cold some-

how, and Frank seems almost to have lost hope already."

Two or three tears rolled down auntie's face as she spoke. For a minute or two Sybil's father said nothing.

"How about telling the children?" he asked at last.

"That's just it," replied auntie. "Frank leaves it to me to tell them or not, as I think best. He would not let Cecil or Louise write, as he thought if it had to be told I had better do so as gently as I could, by word of mouth. But they *must* be told — they are such quick children, I believe Floss suspects it already. And if — and if the next news should be *worse*," continued auntie with a little sob, "I would never forgive myself for not having prepared them, and they would be full of self-reproach for having been happy and merry as usual. Floss would say she should have known it by instinct."

"Would they feel it so much? — could they realise it? They are so young," said Sybil's father.

Auntie shook her head. "Not too young to feel it terribly," she said. "It is much better to tell them. I could not hide the sorrow in my face from those two honest pairs of eyes, for one thing."

"Well, you know best," said her husband.

A sad telling it was, and the way in which the children took it touched auntie's loving heart to the quick. They were so quiet and "pitiful," as little

Sybil said. Floss's face grew white, for, with a child's hasty rush at conclusions, she fancied at first that auntie was paving the way for the worst news of all.

"Is mamma *dead?*" she whispered, and auntie's "Oh no, no, darling. Not so bad as that," seemed to give her a sort of crumb of hope, even before she had heard all.

And Carrots stood beside auntie's knee, clasping his little mother Floss's hand tight, and looking up in auntie's face with those wonderful eyes of his, which auntie had said truly one *could* not deceive; and when he had been told all there was to tell, he just said softly, "Oh *poor* mamma! Auntie, she kissened us so *many* times!"

And then, which auntie was on the whole glad of, the three children sat down on the rug together and cried; Sybil, in her sympathy, as heartily as the others, while she kept kissing and petting them, and calling them by every endearing name she could think of.

"When will there be another letter, auntie?" said Floss.

"The day after to-morrow," said auntie. "Your father will write by every mail."

In her own heart auntie had not much hope. From what Captain Desart said, the anxiety was not likely to last long. The illness had taken a different form from Mrs. Desart's other attacks. "She must

be better or worse in a day or two," he wrote, and auntie's heart sorely misgave her as to which it would be.

The sorrowful day seemed very long to the children. They did their lessons as usual, for auntie told them it would be much better to do so.

"Would it please mamma?" said Carrots; and when auntie said "Yes, she was quite sure it would," he got his books at once, and "tried" even harder than usual.

But after lessons they had no heart to play, and there was no "must" about that. By bed-time they all looked worn out with crying and the sort of strange excitement there is about great sorrows — above all to children — which is more exhausting than almost anything.

"This will never do," thought auntie. "Hugh" (that was the name of Sybil's father) "will have reason to think I should have taken his advice, and not told them, if they go on like this."

"Sybil," she said, "Floss and Carrots will make themselves ill before the next letter comes. What can we do for them?"

Sybil shook her head despondently.

"I don't know, mother dear," she said; "I've got out all my best things to please them, but it's no good." She stood still for a minute, then her face lightened up. "Mother," she said, "'aposing you were to read aloud some of those stories you're

going to get bounded up into a book some day? They would like *that.*"

Floss hardly felt as if she could care to hear *any* stories, however pretty. But she did not like to disappoint kind auntie by saying so, especially when auntie told her she really wanted to know if she and Carrots liked her stories, as it would help her to judge if other children would care for them when they were "bounded up into a book."

So the next day auntie read them some, and they talked them over and got quite interested in them. Fortunately, she did not read them all that day, for the next day there was still more need of something to distract the children's sorrowful thoughts, as the looked-for letter did not come. Auntie would have liked to cheer the children by reminding them of the old sayings that "No news is good news," and "It is ill news which flies fast," but she dared not, for her own heart was very heavy with anxiety. And she was very glad to see them interested in the rest of the stories for the time.

I cannot tell you these stories, but some day perhaps you may come across the little book which they were made into. But there is one of them which I should like to tell you, as it is not very long, and in the children's mind it was always associated with something that happened just as auntie had finished reading it. For it was the last of her little stories, and it was called —

CHAPTER XII.

"THE TWO FUNNY LITTLE TROTS."

"Like to a double cherry."
MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

'"OH mamma," cried I, from the window by which I was standing, to my mother who was working by the fire, "*do* come here and look at these two funny little trots."'

[Auntie had only read this first sentence of her story when Sybil interrupted her.

"Mother dear," she said, in her prim little way, "before you begin, do tell us one thing. Does the story end sadly?"

Auntie smiled. "You should have asked me before I *had* begun, Sybil," she said. "But never mind now. I don't really think I can tell you if it ends sadly or not. It would be like telling you the end at the beginning, and it would spoil the interest, if you understand what that means."

"Very well," said Sybil, resignedly, "then I suppose I must wait. But I *won't* like it if it ends badly, mother, and Floss won't, and Carrots won't. Will you, Floss and Carrots?"

"I don't think Floss and Carrots can say, till

they've heard it," said auntie. "Now, Sybil, you mustn't interrupt any more. Where was I? Oh yes"] — '"*do* come and look at these two funny little trots."

'My mother got up from her seat and came to the window. She could not help smiling when she saw the little couple I pointed out to her.

'"Aren't they a pair of fat darlings?" I said. "I wonder if they live in our terrace?"

'We knew very little of our neighbours, though we were not living in London, for we had only just come to St. Austin's. We had come there to spend the winter, as it was a mild and sheltered place, for I, then a girl of sixteen, had been in delicate health for some time.' ["You wouldn't believe it to see me now, would you?" said auntie, looking up at the children with a smile on her pretty young-looking face, but it was quite true, all the same.] 'I was my mother's only girl,' she went on, turning to her manuscript again, 'and she was a widow, so you can fancy what a pet I was. My big brothers were already all out in the world, in the navy, or the army, or at college, and my mother and I generally lived by ourselves in a country village much farther north than St. Austin's, and it was quite an event to us to leave our own home for several months and settle ourselves down in lodgings in a strange place.

'It seemed a very strange place to us, for we had

not a single friend or acquaintance in it, and at home in our village we knew everybody, and everybody knew us, from the clergyman down to farmer Grinthwait's sheep-dog, and nothing happened without our knowing it. I suppose I was naturally of rather a sociable turn. I knew my mother used sometimes in fun to call me "a little gossip," and I really very much missed the sight of the accustomed friendly faces. We had been two days at St. Austin's, and I had spent most of those two days at the window, declaring to my mother, that I should not feel so "strange" if I got to know some of our neighbours by sight, if nothing more.

'But hitherto I had hardly succeeded even in this. There did not seem to be any "neighbours" in the passers-by; they were just passers-by who never seemed to pass by again, and without anything particular to distinguish them if they did. For St. Austin's was a busy little place, and our house was on the South Esplanade, the favourite "promenade" for the visitors, none of whom, gentlemen, ladies, or children, had particularly attracted me till the morning I first caught sight of my funny little trots.

'I do think they would have attracted any one — any one certainly that loved children. I fancy I see them now, the two dears, coming slowly and solemnly along, each with a hand of their nurse, pulling *well* back from her, as if the effort to keep up, even with her deliberate rate of walking, was

almost too much for their fat little legs. They looked exactly the same size, and were alike in everything, from their dresses — which this first day were brown holland, very easy about the bodies, very short and bunchy about the skirts — to the two white woolly lambs, clasped manfully by each in his or her disengaged hand. Whether they were boys or girls I could not tell in the least, and to this day I do not know.

'"*Aren't* they darlings, mamma?" I said.

'"They certainly are two funny little trots," she replied with a smile, using my own expression.

'Mamma went back to her knitting, but I stayed by the window, watching my new friends. They passed slowly up the Esplanade, my eyes following them till they were out of sight, and then I turned away regretfully.

'"They are sure not to pass again," I said, "and they are so nice."

'"If they live near here, very likely the Esplanade is their daily walk, and they will be passing back again in a few minutes," said my mother, entering into my fancy.

'I took up her suggestion eagerly. She was right: in about a quarter of an hour my trots appeared again, this time from the other direction, and, as good luck would have it, just opposite our window, their nurse happening to meet an acquaintance, they came to a halt!

'"Mamma, mamma," I exclaimed, "here they are again!"

'Mamma nodded her head and smiled without looking up. She was just then counting the rows of her knitting, and was afraid of losing the number. I pressed my face close to the window — if only the trots would look my way! — I could hardly resist tapping on the pane.

'Suddenly a bright thought struck me. I seized Gip, my little dog, who was asleep on the hearth-rug, and held him up to the window.

'"T'ss, Gip; T'ss, cat. At her; at her," I exclaimed.

'Poor Gip had doubtless been having delightful dreams — it was very hard on him to be wakened up so startlingly. He blinked his eyes and tried to see the imaginary cat — no doubt he thought it was his own fault he did not succeed, for he was the most humble-minded and unpresuming of little dogs, and his faith in me was unbounded. He could not see a cat, but he took it for granted that *I* did; so he set to work barking vigorously. That was just what I wanted. The trots heard the noise and both turned round; then they let go their nurse's hands and made a little journey round her skirts till they met.

'"Dot," said one, "pretty doggie."

'"Doll," said the other, both speaking at once, you understand, "pretty doggie."

'I don't mean to say that I *heard* what they said, I

"Suddenly a Bright Thought struck me, I seized Gip, my Little Dog, who was asleep on the Hearth-rug, and held him up at the Window."—p. 146.

only *saw* it. But afterwards, when I had heard their voices, I felt sure that was what they had said, for they almost always spoke together.

'Then they joined their disengaged hands (the outside hand of each still clasping its woolly lamb), and there they stood, legs well apart, little mouths and eyes wide open, staring with the greatest interest and solemnity at Gip and me. At Gip, of course, far more than at me. Gip was a dog, *I* was only a girl! — quite a middle-aged person, no doubt, the trots thought me, if they thought about me at all; perhaps they did a little, as I was Gip's owner; for I was sixteen, and they could not have been much more than three.

'But all this time they were so solemn. I wanted to make them laugh. There was a little table in the window — a bow window, *of course*, as it was at the sea-side, and certain to catch winds from every quarter of the heavens — upon which I mounted Gip, and set to work putting him through his tricks. I made him perform "ready, present, *fire*," with a leap to catch the bit of biscuit on his nose. I made him "beg," "lie dead," like Mother Hubbard's immortal pet, and do everything a well-educated dog could be expected to do. And, oh, how funny it was to watch the trots! Evidently they had never seen anything of the kind before; they stared at first as if they could hardly believe their eyes, and then they smiled, and, *at last*, they laughed. How prettily they

laughed — they looked more like two fat cherubs than ever.

'But their laughing attracted their maid's attention. She too turned round, and I was pleased to see that she had a pleasant pretty young face. "I shouldn't have liked those dear trots to have a cross old nurse," I said to myself, and the maid still further raised herself in my good opinion by laughing and smiling too. In a minute or two when she thought "that was enough for to-day," she stooped and whispered to the trots. They immediately lifted their little hands, the right of one, the left of the other — for *nothing*, you see, could have persuaded them to let go of their precious lambs — to their rosy mouths and blew a kiss to me, and I could *see* them say, "Zank zou, lady; zank zou, doggie."

'You may be sure I kissed my hand to them in return, and off they toddled, each with a hand of "Bessie," as I afterwards heard them call their maid, and hauling back manfully as before, which gave Bessie the look of a very large steam-tug convoying two very little vessels.

'I watched them till they were quite out of sight. Then I turned to my mother.

'"I have made two friends here anyway, mamma," I said. "The trots are sure to stop every time they pass. It will be something to watch for."

'Mamma smiled. She was pleased to see *me* pleased and interested, for she had been beginning to fear that the dulness and strangeness of our new life would prevent St. Austin's doing me as much good as she had hoped.

'"To-morrow, dear," she said, "if it is fine, I hope you will be able to go a little walk, and we'll look out for your little friends."

'It was fine the next day, and we did go out, and we did meet the trots!

'They caught sight of me (of Gip, rather, I should perhaps say) and I of them, just about the same moment. I saw them tug their nurse, and when they got close up to me they stopped short. It was no use Bessie's trying to get them on; there they stood resolutely, till the poor girl's face grew red, and she looked quite ashamed. Gip, who I must say, had a wonderful amount of tact, ran up to them with a friendly little bark. Bessie let go the trots' hands and stooped to stroke him.

'"He won't bite, miss, will he?" she said gently, looking up at me.

'"Oh, dear, no," I said, and the trots, smiling with delight, stooped — not that they had so very far to stoop — to stroke him too.

'"Pretty doggie," said Doll.

'"Pretty doggie," said Dot.

'Then they held up their dear little mouths to kiss me. "Zank zou, lady," they said, and each

taking a hand of Bessie again, they proceeded on their way.

'After that day, not many passed without my seeing them, and talking to them, and making Gip show off his tricks. Sometimes our meetings were at the window, sometimes on the road; once or twice, when there came some unusually fine mild days, mamma let me sit out on the shore, and I taught the trots to dig a hole for Gip and bury him in the sand, all but his bright eyes and funny black nose — that *was* a beautiful game! I never found out exactly where my friends lived; it was in one of the side streets leading on to the Esplanade, that was all I knew. I never knew, as I said, if they were boys or girls, or perhaps one of each. Mamma wanted one day to ask Bessie, but I wouldn't let her. They were just my two little trots, that was all I wanted to know.

'"It would spoil them to fancy them growing up into great boys or girls," I said. "I want them to be always trots — nothing else."

'And as Bessie called them simply Doll and Dot, without any "master" or "miss," I was able to keep my fancy.

'When the weather grew colder, the trots came out in a new costume — sealskin coats, sealskin caps, and sealskin gloves — they were just little balls of sealskin, and looked "trottier" than ever. About this time they left off carrying their woolly lambs.

I suspect the real reason was that their extreme affection for the lambs had resulted in these favoured animals growing more black than white, and that Bessie judged them unfit for appearing in public, but if this *was* the case, evidently Bessie had been obliged to resort to artifice to obtain their owners' consent to the lambs being left at home. For, when I asked the trots where the precious creatures were, they looked melancholy and distressed and shook their heads.

'"Too told!" said Doll, and Dot repeated, like mournful echo, "too told!"

'"Of course," said I, "how stupid of me not to think of it! of course it's far too cold for such very little lambs to be out."

'Bessie looked gratefully at me. "We're going to buy some cakes for tea," she said, with a smile, and sure enough in about half-an-hour the trio reappeared again, and came to a standstill as usual, opposite our window. And, instead of a lamb, each trot hugged a little parcel, neatly done up in white paper. I opened the window to hear what they were saying, they looked so excited.

'"Takes for tea," they both called out at once, "takes for tea. Lady have one. Dip have one."

'And poor Bessie was obliged to open the parcels, and extract one "take" from each and hand them up to me, before my little dears would be satisfied.

'Can you fancy that I really got to love the trots? I did not want to know who they were, or what sort of a father and mother they had — they were well taken care of, that was evident, for somehow, knowing anything more about them would have spoilt them for being my funny little trots.

'But, for several weeks of the three months we spent at St. Austin's, the sight of these happy little creatures was one of my greatest pleasures, and a day without a glimpse of them would have seemed blank and dull.

'There came a time, however, when for many days I did not see my little friends. The weather was bad just then, and mamma said she was sure they had got colds, that would be all that was wrong with them, but somehow I felt uneasy. I asked our doctor, when he called, if there was much illness about, and he, fancying I was nervous on my own account, replied, "Oh no, with the exception of two or three cases of croup, he had no serious ailments among his patients: it was a very healthy season."

'I got frightened at the idea of croup, and cross-questioned him to discover if my trots were among the sufferers, but he shook his head. All his little patients were mere infants; he did not even know the trots by sight.

'Then mamma suggested another very reasonable explanation of their disappearance.

'"They have probably left St. Austin's," she said. "Many people come here for only the *very* worst of the winter, and that is about over now."

'But even this did not satisfy me. I was certain something was wrong with Doll and Dot, and I wasted, I should be ashamed to say how many hours gazing out of the window in hopes of catching sight of the familiar little figures.

'At last, one day, when I had almost left off hoping ever to see them again, suddenly, *two* figures appeared on the Esplanade, a stone's throw from our window.

'Who were they? Could it be — yes, it must be *one* of the trots, led by, not Bessie, no, this maid was a stranger. Where could Bessie be? And oh, *where* was my other little trot? For, even at some yards' distance, I saw something sadly different in the appearance of the one little figure, slowly coming along in our direction. It was dressed — hat, coat, gloves, socks and all — it was dressed in deep mourning.

'I seized my hat and rushed out to meet them. Mamma thought I was going out of my mind I believe. When I found myself in the open air, I tried to control myself and look like the rest of the people walking quietly along, though my heart was beating violently, and I felt as if I could not speak without crying. But when I got up to the one little trot and its attendant, the

sight of her strange face composed me. She was so different from Bessie — old and stiff and prim-looking. I stooped to kiss the child, Dot or Doll, I knew not which. "How are you, darling?" I said, "And where is — " I stopped short.

'The trot looked up in my face.

'"Oh lady," it said, "Dot is all alone. Doll is done to 'Ebben," and the great tears gathered in Dot's mournful eyes and rolled down Dot's rosy cheeks.

'"Hush, hush, my dear. You mustn't cry. You'll make yourself ill if you cry any more," said the hard-looking nurse.

'A moment before, I had intended turning to her and asking for some particulars of the baby's sad words, but now I felt I *could* not. She was so stiff and unsympathising. I could not bear her to see me, a stranger, crying about what I had heard. Besides, what good would it do? Why should I hear any more? I shrank from doing so. The bare fact was enough. I just bent down and kissed the solitary darling.

'"Good-bye, my trot," I said. I could not say another word.

'"Dood-bye, don't ky," said Dot, stroking my cheek. "Doll won't tum back, but Dot will do to 'Ebben too some day."

'That was quite too much for me. I turned away and hurried back home as fast as I could.

'"Mamma," I exclaimed, rushing into our sitting-room, and throwing myself down on the sofa, "it's just what I thought. I wish you would come away from St. Austin's at once. I shall never, never like it again."

'"What *is* the matter, Florence?" said poor mamma, quite startled.

'"It's about the trots," I said, now fairly sobbing, "I have just seen one — in deep mourning, mamma, — and — and — the other one is *dead*."

'"Poor little angel!" said mamma. And the tears came into her eyes too.

'I did not see Dot again after that day. I fancy that was its last walk before leaving St. Austin's for its regular home, wherever that was. And a very short time after, we ourselves left too.

* * * * * * * * *

'I never forgot the trots. Of course the pleasure of going back to our own dear home again, and seeing all our old friends, raised my spirits, and softened the real grief I had felt. But whenever we spoke of St. Austin's, or people asked me about it, and mentioned the esplanade or the shore, or any of the places where I had seen the trots, the tears *would* come into my eyes, as again I seemed to see before me the two dear funny little figures. And whenever our plans for the following winter were alluded to, I always said one thing: "Wherever you go, mamma, don't go to St. Austin's."

'My mother gave in to me. When did she not? How patient she was with me, how sympathising, even in my fancies! And how unselfish — it was not till long after we had left St. Austin's, that she told me what anxiety she had gone through on hearing of my having kissed little Dot. For how sadly probable it seemed that Doll had died of some infectious illness, such as scarlet-fever, for instance, which I had never had!

'"But *Dot* couldn't have been ill, mamma," I said. "Dot looked perfectly well."

'"Did he?" said my mother. Sometimes she called the trots "he" and sometimes "she," in the funniest way! "I wonder what the other little dear died of?"

'"So do I," I replied. "Still, on the whole, I think I am just as well pleased not to know."

'Our uncertainty for the next winter ended in what was to me a delightful decision. We determined to go to the South of France. I could amuse you children by a description of our journey — journeys in those days really were much more amusing than now; but I must hasten on to the end of my story. We had fixed upon Pau as our head-quarters, and we arrived there early in November. What a different thing from our November at home! I could hardly believe it *was* November; it would have seemed to me far less wonderful to have been told I had been asleep for six months, and that *really*

it was May, and not November at all, than to have awakened as I did, that first morning after our arrival, and to have seen out of the window the lovely sunshine and bright blue sky, and summer-look of warmth, and comfort, and radiance!

'We had gone to an hotel for a few days, intending to look out for a little house, or "apartement" (which, children, does not mean the same thing as our English lodgings by any means), at our leisure. Your grandmother was not rich, and the coming so far cost a great deal. The hotel we had been recommended to, was a very comfortable one, though not one of the most fashionable, and the landlord was very civil, as some friend who had stayed with him the year before had written about our coming. He showed us our rooms himself, and hoped we should like them, and then he turned back to say he trusted we should not be disturbed by the voices of some children in the next "salon." He would not have risked it, he said, had he been able to help it, but there were no other rooms vacant, and the family with the children were leaving the next day. Not that they were noisy children by any means; they were very *chers petits*, but there *were* ladies, to whom the very name of children in their vicinity was — here the landlord held up his hands and made a grimace!

'"Then they must be old maids!" I said, laughing, "which mamma and I are not. We love chil-

dren," at which Mr. Landlord bowed and smiled, and said something complimentary about mademoiselle being so "aimable."

'I listened for the children's voices that evening, and once or twice I heard their clear merry tones. But as for any "disturbance," one might as well have complained of a cuckoo in the distance, as of anything we heard of our little neighbours. We did not see them; only once, as I was running along the passage, I caught a glimpse at the other end of a little pinafored figure led by a nurse, disappearing through a doorway. I did not see its face; in fact the glimpse was of the hastiest. Yet *something* about the wee figure, a certain round-about bunchiness, and a sort of pulling back from the maid, as she went into the room, recalled vaguely to my heart, rather than to my mind, two little toddling creatures, that far away across the sea I had learnt to love and look for. When I went into our room, there were tears in my eyes, and when mamma asked me the reason, I told her that I had seen a child that somehow had reminded me of my two little trots.

'"Poor little trots," said mamma. "I wonder if the one that was left still misses the other?"

'But that was all we said about them.

'The next morning I was in a fever to go out and see all that was to be seen. I dragged poor mamma into all the churches, and half the shops, and would

have had her all through the castle too, but that she declared she could do no more. So we came to a halt at the great "Place," and sat down on a nice shady seat to watch the people. I, consoling myself with the reflection, that as we were to be four months at Pau, there was still a *little* time left for sight-seeing.

'It was very amusing. There were people of all nations — *children* of all nations, little French boys and girls, prettily but simply dressed, some chatting merrily, some walking primly beside their white-capped bonnes; little Russians, looking rather grand, but not *so* grand as their nurses in their rich costumes of bright scarlet and blue, embroidered in gold; some very pert, shrill-voiced Americans, and a few unmistakable English. We amused ourselves by guessing the nationality of all these little people.

'"*Those* are Italians or Spaniards, mamma, look what dark eyes they have, and *those* are —" I suddenly stopped. "Oh, mamma!" I exclaimed, and when she looked at me, she saw I had grown quite pale, and in another moment, seeing to what I was pointing, she understood the reason. There, right before us, coming slowly up the middle of the Place, Bessie in the middle, each child with a hand of hers tugging back manfully in the old way, each, yes, *really*, each under the other arm hugging a woolly lamb, came the two funny little trots!

'I felt at first as if I were dreaming. *Could* it be the trots? I sat still in a half stupid way, staring, but Gip — I was forgetting to tell you that *of course* Gip had come with us to Pau — Gip had far more presence of mind than I. He did not stop to wonder *how* it could be the trots, he was simply satisfied that it *was* the trots, and forwards he darted, leaping, barking furiously, wagging his tail, giving every sort of welcome in dog language, that he could think of.

'"Dip, Dip; see Bessie, here is a doggie like Dip," said one trot.

'"Dip, Dip, pretty Dip," said the other.

'The sound of their voices seemed to bring back my common sense. They *were* my own dear trots. "Dip, Dip" would have satisfied me, even if I had not seen them. The trots never *could* manage the letter "G"! I flew forwards, and kneeling down on the ground, little caring how I soiled my nice new dress, or what the people on the Place thought of me, I regularly hugged my two pets.

'"Here is Dip's kind lady too," they both said at once, smiling and happy, but not by any means particularly surprised to see me. I looked up at Bessie at last, and held out my hand. She shook it heartily.

'"I *am* pleased to see you again, miss, to be sure; who would have thought it?" she said. "And they haven't forgot you, haven't Doll and Dot. They are always speaking of Gip and you, miss."

'"But, Bessie," I began, and then I hesitated. How could I tell her what I had thought? "How was it you left St. Austin's so suddenly?" — the trots were not in mourning now, they were prettily dressed in dark blue sailor serge, as bunchy as ever.

'Bessie thought for a minute.

'"Let me see," she said, "oh yes, I remember! We did leave suddenly. My mistress's father died, and she was sent for off to Edinburgh, and she took Doll and me, and left Dot to keep her papa company. Master said he'd be lost without one of them, and he couldn't get off to Edinburgh for a fortnight after us. But we'll never try *that* again, miss. Dot did nothing but cry for Doll, and Doll for Dot. Dot, so Martha the housemaid said, was always saying, 'Doll's done to 'Ebben,' till it was pitiful to hear, and Dot was just as bad in Edinburgh about Doll."

'"But Dot *did* do to 'Ebben," said Doll, who as well as Dot was listening to what Bessie was saying. "And then Doll tummed to 'Ebben too," said Dot, "and then 'Ebben was nice."

'I kissed the pets again, partly to prevent Bessie seeing the tears in my eyes. I understood it all now, without asking any more, and Bessie never knew what it was I *had* thought.

'Only you can fancy how sorry I was to find the trots were leaving Pau that very afternoon! They

were the children whose dear little voices I had heard through the wall, who the landlord had feared might disturb us! They were going on to Italy for the winter.

'"If only I had known last night who they were," I said to mamma regretfully.

'Mamma, however, was always wise. "Think rather," she said, "how very glad you should be to know it this morning. And who can tell but what some time or other you may see the trots again."

'But I never did!'"

CHAPTER XIII.

GOOD ENDINGS.

But I lost my happy childhood.

* * * * *

It slipped from me you shall know,
It was in the dewy alley
Of the land of long ago.

* * * * *

Not in sadness,
Nor reproach, these words I say,
God is good, and gives new gladness,
When the old He takes away.

"You never did? oh what a pity!" exclaimed Sybil. "You really never, never did, mother?"

Auntie looked rather "funny," as the children call it.

"As *trots* I never saw them again," she said, "and at the time I wrote out that story I had not seen them again at all."

"But you've seen them since," cried all the three children at once, "you've seen them since they've grown big. Oh auntie, oh mother, do tell us."

"I couldn't just now, truly I couldn't," said auntie, "it would lead me into another story which isn't written yet. All that I know about 'the two

funny little trots' I have told you. Do you like it?"

"Awfully," said Sybil.

"*Very* much," said Floss.

"It's lovely," said Carrots.

Auntie smiled at the children. They looked so pleased and interested, it was evident that for the time they had forgotten their sorrow and anxiety. Suddenly, just as she was thinking sadly how soon it must return to their minds, there came a loud ring at the bell. They all started, they had been sitting so quietly.

"It must be the post," said Sybil. Auntie had thought so too, but had not said it, as it was very unlikely this post would bring any letter from Captain Desart.

It did however! Fletcher appeared with one in another minute; the thin large envelope, and the black, rather scrawly writing that Floss and Carrots knew so well. It would have been no use trying to conceal it from them, so auntie opened it quietly, though her fingers trembled as she did so. She read it very quickly, it was not a long letter, and then she looked up with the tears in her eyes. "Children, dear children," she said, "it *is* good news. Your dear mother is a little better, and they have good hopes of her."

Oh how glad they were! They kissed auntie and Sybil and each other, and it seemed as if a great

heavy stone had been lifted off their hearts. There was still of course reason for *anxiety*, but there was hope, "good hope," wrote Captain Desart, and what does not that mean? Auntie felt so hopeful herself that she could not find it in her heart to check the children for being so.

"It is because you made the story of the trots end nicely that that nice letter came," said Sybil, and nothing that her mother could say would persuade her that *she* had nothing to do with the ending, that she had just told it as it really happened!

I am telling you the story of Floss and Carrots as it really happened too, and I am so glad that it — the story of this part of their young lives, that is to say — ends happily too. Their mother did get better, wonderfully better, and was able to come back to England in the spring, looking stronger than for many years. To England, but not to Sandyshore. Captain Desart got another appointment much farther south, where the climate was milder and better and the winters not to be dreaded for a delicate person. So they all left the Cove House!

Their new home was of course by the sea too, but Carrots never would allow that it was the same sea. His own old sea stayed behind at Sandyshore, though if he were to go to look for it there now I doubt if he would find it. When old

friends once get away into the country of long ago, they are hard to find again — we learn to doubt if they are to be found anywhere except in their own corners of our memory.

And it is long ago now since the days when Carrots and his dear Floss ran races on the sands and made "plans" together. Long ago, in so far that you would not be able *anywhere* to find these children whom I loved so much, and whom I have told you a little about. You would, at least I *hope* you would, like to know what became of them, how they grew up, and what Carrots did when he got to be a man. But this I cannot now tell you, for my little book is long enough — I only hope you are not tired of it — only I may tell you one thing. If any of you know a very good, kind, gentle, brave man — so good that he cannot but be kind; so brave that he cannot but be gentle, I should like you to think that, perhaps, whatever he is — clergyman, doctor, soldier, sailor, it doesn't matter in the least — *perhaps* when that man was a boy, he was my little Carrots. Especially if he has large "doggy-looking," brown eyes, and hair that once *might* have been called "red."

THE END.

"The Story of Sunny." — p. 63.

— *Frontispiece.*

A CHRISTMAS CHILD

A Sketch of a Boy-Life

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

AUTHOR OF "CARROTS," "CUCKOO CLOCK," "TELL ME A STORY," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER CRANE

"O Christmas, merry Christmas!
Is it really come again?
With its memories and greetings,
With its joy and with its pain"

New York

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1910

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TO

The Two Friends

WHO WILL BEST UNDERSTAND

THIS SIMPLE LITTLE STORY

I DEDICATE IT

WITH MUCH AFFECTION

Paris, May, 1880

A CHRISTMAS CHILD.

CHAPTER I.

BABY TED.

"Where did you get those eyes so blue?"
"Out of the sky as I came through."

CHRISTMAS WEEK a good many years ago. Not an "old-fashioned" Christmas this year, for there was no snow or ice; the sky was clear and the air pure, but yet without the sharp, bracing clearness and purity that Master Jack Frost brings when he comes to see us in one of his nice, bright, sunny humours. For he has humours as well as other people — not only is he fickle in the extreme, but even *black* sometimes, and he is then, I can assure you, a most disagreeable visitor. But this Christmas time he had taken it into his head not to come at all, and the world looked rather reproachful and disconcerted. The poor, bare December world — it misses its snow garment, so graciously hiding all imperfections revealed by the absence of green grass and fluttering leaves; it misses, too, its winter

jewels of icicles and hoar frost. Poor old world! What a great many Decembers you have jogged through; no wonder you begin to feel that you need a little dressing up and adorning, like a beauty no longer as young as she has been. Yet ever-young world, too! Who, that gazes at March's daffodils and sweet April's primroses, can believe that the world is growing old? Sometimes one could almost wish that it would leave off being so exquisitely, so heartlessly young. For the daffodils nod their golden heads, the primroses smile up through their leafy nests — year after year, they never fail us. But the children that loved them so; the little feet that trotted so eagerly down the lanes, the tiny hands that gathered the flower-treasures with such delight — where are they all? Men and women, some in far-off lands, perhaps; or too wearied by cares and sorrows to look for the spring flowers of long ago. And some — the sweetest of all, *these* seem — farther away still, and yet surely nearer? in the happier land, whose flowers our fancy tries in vain to picture.

But I am forgetting a little, I think, that I am going to tell about a child to children, and that my "tellings" begin, not in March or April, but at Christmas time. Christmas time, fortunately, does not depend on Jack Frost for *all* its pleasures. Christmas boxes are just as welcome without as with his presence. And never was a Christmas

box more welcome than one that came to a certain house by the sea one twenty-sixth of December, now a good many years ago.

Yet it was not a very big present, nor a very uncommon present. But it was very precious, and, to *my* thinking, very, very pretty; for it was a wee baby boy. Such a dear wee baby, I think you would have called it; so neat and tiny, and with such nice baby-blue eyes. Its hands and feet, especially, were very delightful. "*Almost* as pretty as newly-hatched ducklings, aren't they?" a little girl I know once said of some baby feet that she was admiring, and I really think she was right. No wonder was it, that the happy people in the house by the sea were very proud of their Christmas box, that the baby's mother, especially, thought there never was, never could be, anything so sweet as her baby Ted.

But poor baby Ted had not long to wait for his share of the troubles which we are told come to all, though it does seem as if some people, and children too, had more than others. He was a very delicate little baby. His mother did not notice it at first, because, you see, he was the first baby she had ever had of her very own, and she was too pleased to think him anything but perfect. And indeed he *was* perfect of his kind, only there was so little of him! He was like one of those very, very tiny little white flowers that one has to hunt under the

hedges for, and which surprise you by their daintiness when you look at them closely. Only such fragile daintiness needs tender handling, and these little half-opened buds sometimes shrink from the touch of even the kindest of mothers and nurses, and gently fade out of their sight to bloom in a sunnier and softer clime than ours. And knowing this, a cold chill crept round the heart of little Ted's mother when his nurse, who was older and wiser than she, shook her head sadly as she owned that he was about the tiniest baby she had ever seen. But the cold chill did not stay there. Ted, who was scarcely a month old, gave a sudden smile of baby pleasure as she was anxiously looking at him. He had caught sight of some bright flowers on the wall, and his blue eyes had told him that the proper thing to do was to smile at them. And his smile was to his mother like the sun breaking through a cloud.

"I will not be afraid for my darling," said she. "God knows what is best for him, but I think, I do *think*, he will live to grow a healthy, happy boy. How could a Christmas child be anything else?"

And she was right. Day after day, week by week, month after month, the wee man grew bigger and stronger. It was not all smooth sailing, however. He had to fight pretty hard for his little share of the world and of life sometimes. And

many a sad fit of baby-crying made his mother's heart ache as she asked herself if after all it might not be better for her poor little boy to give up the battle which seemed so trying to him. But no — that was not Master Ted's opinion at all. He cried, and he would not go to sleep, and he cried again. But all through the crying and the restlessness he was growing stronger and bigger.

"The world strikes me as not half a bad place. I mean to look about me in it and see all that there is to be seen," I could fancy his baby mind thinking to itself, when he was held at his nursery window, and his bright eyes gazed out unweariedly at the beautiful sights to be seen from it — the mountains in the distance lifting their grand old heads to the glorious sky, which Ted looked as if he knew a good deal about if he chose to tell; the sea near at hand with its ever-changing charm and the white sails scudding along in the sunlight. Ah yes, little Ted was in the right — the world *is* a very pretty place, and a baby boy whose special corner of it is where his was, is a very lucky little person, notwithstanding the pains and grievances of babyhood.

And before long Ted's fits of crying became so completely a thing of the past that it was really difficult to believe in them. All his grumbling and complaining and tears were got over in these first few months. For "once he had got a start,"

as his nurse called it, never was there a happier little fellow. Everything came right to him, and the few clouds that now and then floated over his skies but made the sunshine seem the brighter.

And day by day the world grew prettier and pleasanter to him. It had been very pleasant to be carried out in his nurse's arms or wheeled along in his little carriage, but when it came to toddling on the nice firm sands on his own sturdy legs, and sometimes — when nurse would let him — going "kite kite close" to the playful waves, and then jumping back again when they "pertended," as he said, to wet his little feet — ah, that was too delightful! And almost more delightful still was it to pick up nice smooth stones on the beach and try how far he could throw them into the sea. The sea was *so* pretty and kind, he thought. It was for a long time very difficult for him to believe that it could ever be angry and raging and wild, as he used to hear said, for of course on wet or stormy days little Ted never went down to the shore, but stayed at home in his own warm nursery.

There were pretty shells and stones and seaweed to be found on this delightful sea-shore. Ted was too little to care much for such quiet business as gathering stones and shells, but one day when he was walking with his mother she stopped so often to pick up and examine any that took her fancy, that at last Ted's curiosity was awakened.

"What is thoo doing?" he said gravely, as if not quite sure that his mother was behaving correctly, for *nurse* always told him to "walk on straight, there's a good boy, Master Ted," and it was a little puzzling to understand that mammas might do what little boys must not. It was one of the puzzles which Ted found there were a good many of in the world, and which he had to think over a good deal in his own mind before it grew clear to him. "What is thoo doing?" he asked.

"I am looking for pretty stones to take home and keep," replied his mother.

"Pitty 'tones," repeated Ted, and then he said no more, but some new ideas had wakened in his baby mind.

Nurse noticed that he was quieter than usual that afternoon, for already Ted was a good deal of a chatterbox. But his eyes looked bright, and plainly he had some pleasant thought in his head. The next day was fine, and he went off with nurse for his walk. He looked a little anxious as they got to the turn of the road, or rather to the joining of two roads, one of which led to the sea, the other into country lanes.

"Thoo is doing to the sea?" he inquired.

"Yes, dear," nurse replied, and Ted's face cleared. When they got to the shore he trotted on quietly, but his eyes were very busy, busier even than usual. They looked about them in all directions,

till at last they spied what they wanted, and for half a minute or so nurse did not notice that her little charge had left her side and was lagging behind.

"What are you about, Master Ted?" she said hastily, as glancing round she saw him stooping down — not that he had very far to stoop, poor little man — and struggling to lift some object at his feet.

"A 'tone," he cried, "a beauty big 'tone for Ted's muzzer," lifting in his arms a big round stone — one of the kind that as children we used to say had dropped from the moon — which by its nice round shape and speckledness had caught his eye. "Ted will cally it hisself."

And with a very red face, he lugged it manfully along.

"Let me help you with it, dear," said nurse.

But "No, zank thoo," he replied firmly each time that the offer was repeated. "Ted must cally it his own self."

And "cally" it he did, all the way. Nurse could only succeed in getting him to put it down now and then to rest a bit, as she said, for the stone was really so big a one that she was afraid of it seriously tiring his arms. More than once she pointed out prettier and smaller stones, and tried to suggest that his mother might like them quite as well, or better; but no. The bigness, the heaviness even,

was its charm; to do something that cost him an effort for mother he felt vaguely was his wish; the "lamp of sacrifice," of *self*-sacrifice, had been lighted in his baby heart, never again to be extinguished.

And, oh, the happiness in that little heart when at last he reached his mother's room, still lugging the heavy stone, and laid it at her feet!

"Ted broughtened it for thoo," he exclaimed triumphantly. And mother was *so* pleased! The stone took up its place at once on the mantelpiece as an ornament, and the wearied little man climbed up on to his mother's knee, with a look of such delight and satisfaction as is sweet to be seen on a childish face.

So Ted's education began. He was growing beyond the birds and the flowers already, though only a tiny man of three; and every day he found new things to wonder at, and admire, and ask questions about, and, unlike some small people of his age, he always listened to the answers.

After a while he found prettier presents to bring home to his mother than big stones. With the spring days the flowers came back, and Ted, who last year had been too little to notice them much, grew to like the other turning of the road almost better than that which led to the sea. For down the lanes, hiding in among the hedges, or more boldly smiling up at him in the fields, he learnt to

know the old friends that all happy children love so dearly.

One day he found some flowers that seemed to him prettier than any he had ever seen, and full of delight he trudged home with a baby bouquet of them in his little hot hands. It was getting past spring into summer now, and Ted felt a little tired by the time he and his nurse had reached the house, and he ran in as usual to find his mother and relate his adventures.

"Ted has broughtened some most beauty flowers," he eagerly cried, and his mother stooped down to kiss and thank him, even though she was busy talking to some ladies who had come to see her, and whom Ted in his hurry had hardly noticed. He glanced round at them now with curiosity and interest. He rather liked ladies to come to see his mother, only he would have liked it still better if they would have just let him stay quietly beside her, looking at them and listening to what they said, without noticing him. But that way of behaving would not have seemed kind, and as Ted grew older he understood this, and learnt that it was right to feel pleased at being spoken to and even kissed.

"How well Ted is looking," said one of the ladies to his mother. "He is growing quite a big, strong boy. And what pretty flowers he has brought you. Are you very fond of flowers, my little man?"

"Ses," said Ted, looking up in the lady's face.

"The wild flowers about here are very pretty," said another of the ladies.

"Very pretty," said his mother; "but it is curious, is it not, that there are no cowslips in this country? They are such favourites of mine. I have such pleasant remembrances of them as a child."

She turned, for Ted was tugging gently at her sleeve. "What is towslips?" he asked.

"Pretty little yellow flowers, something like primroses," said his mother.

"Oh!" said Ted. Then nurse knocked at the door, and told him his tea was ready, and so he trotted off.

"Mother loves towslips," he said to himself two or three times over, till his nurse asked him what he was talking about.

"But there's no cowslips here," said nurse, when he had repeated it.

"No," said Ted; "but p'raps Ted could find some. Ted will go and look to-morrow with nursey."

"To-morrow's Sunday, Master Ted," said nurse; "I'll be going to church."

"What's church?" he asked.

"Church is everybody praying to God, all together in a big house. Don't you remember, Master Ted?"

"Oh ses, Ted 'members," he replied. "What's praying to Dod, nurse?"

"Why, I am sure you know that, Master Ted. You must have forgotten. Ask your mamma again."

Ted took her advice. Later in the evening he went downstairs to say good-night. His mother was outside, walking about the garden, for it was a beautiful summer evening. Ted ran to her; but on his way something caught his eye, which sent a pang to his little heart. It was the bunch of flowers he had gathered for her, lying withered already, poor little things, on a bench just by the door, where she had laid them when saying good-bye to her visitors. Ted stopped short; his face grew very red, and big tears rose slowly to his eyes. He was carefully collecting them together in his little hand when his mother called to him.

"Come, Ted, dear," she said; "what are you about?"

More slowly than his wont Ted trotted towards her. "Muzzer doesn't care for zem," he said, holding out his neglected offering. "Poor f'owers dies when they's leaved out of water."

"My darling," said his mother with real sorrow in her voice, "I am so sorry, so very sorry, dear little Ted," and she stooped to kiss him. "Give them to me now, and I will *always* keep them."

Ted was quickly consoled.

"Zem's not towslips," he said regretfully. "Ted would like towslips for muzzer." And then with a quick change of thought he went on, "What is praying to Dod?" he said, looking up eagerly with his bright blue eyes.

"Praying to God means asking Him anything we want, and then He answers us. Just as you ask me something, and I answer you. And if what we ask is good for us, He gives it us. That is one way of answering our prayers, but there are many ways. You will understand better when you are bigger, dear little Ted."

Ted asked no more, but a bright pleased look came into his face. He was fond of asking questions, but he did not ask silly ones, nor tease and tease as some children do, and, as I said, when he got an answer he thought it well over in his little head till he got to understand, or thought he understood. Till now his mother had thought him too little to teach him to say his prayers, but now in her own mind she began to feel he was getting old enough to say some simple prayer night and morning, and she resolved to teach him some day soon.

So now she kissed him and bade him good-night.

"God bless my little boy," she said, as she patted his head with its soft fair hair which hung in pretty careless curls, and was cut across the forehead in front like one of Sir Joshua Reynolds' cherubs.

"God bless my little boy," she said, and Ted trotted off again, still with the bright look on his face.

He let nurse put him to bed very "goodly," though bed-time never came very welcomely to the active little man.

"Now go to sleep, Master Ted, dear," said nurse as she covered him up and then left the room, as she was busy about some work that evening.

Ted's room was next to his mother's. Indeed, if the doors were left open, it was quite easy to talk one to the other. This evening his mother happened to go upstairs not long after he had been tucked into bed. She was arranging some things in her own room, moving about quietly not to waken him, if, as she hoped, he had fallen asleep, for falling asleep did not come so easily to Ted as to some children. He was too busy in his mind, he had too many things to think about and wonder about for his brain to settle itself quietly all in a minute. And if he had a strong wish, I think it was that going-to-bed time should never come at all!

For a minute or two no sound reached Ted's mother.

"I do hope he is asleep," she said to herself, but just then she stopped short to listen. Ted was speaking to himself softly, but clearly and distinctly. What could he be saying? His mother listened with a smile on her face, but the smile grew into a sort of sweet gravity as she distin-

guished the words. Little Ted was *praying*. He had not waited for her to teach him — his baby-spirit had found out the simple way for itself — he was just asking God for what he wanted.

"Please, dear Dod," he said, "tell me why thoo won't make towslips grow in this countly. Muzzer loves zem so."

Then came a perfect silence. Ted seemed to be holding his breath in expectation, and somehow his mother too stood as still as could be. And after a minute or two the little voice began again.

"Please, dear Dod, *please* do tell me," and then the silence returned as before. It did not last so long, however, this time — not more than a minute at most had passed when a sound of faint crying broke upon Ted's mother's hearing — the little fellow had burst into tears.

Then his mother could stay away no longer.

"What is the matter, my boy?" she said; anxious, baby though he was, not to make him feel ashamed of his innocent prayers by finding that she had overheard what he had said when he thought himself alone.

"What is my Ted crying about?"

The tears, which had stopped for an instant, came back again.

"Muzzer," he said, "Dod *won't* 'peak to Ted. Ted p'ayed and p'ayed, and Ted was kite kite

kiet, but Dod didn't 'amswer.' Is 'Dod a'leep, muzzer?"'

"No, my boy, but what was it that Ted wanted so much?"

"Ted wanted towslips for muzzer, but Dod *won't* amswer," he repeated piteously.

A shower of kisses was mother's answer, and gently and patiently she tried to make him understand the *seeming* silence which had caused his innocent tears. And, as was Ted's "way," he listened and believed. But "some day," he said to his mother, "some day," would she not take him to "a countly where towslips *did* grow?"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE GARDEN.

"Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Sweet wagging cowslips, they bend and they bow."
SONGS OF SEVEN.

DOWN below the garden of Ted's pretty home flowed, or danced rather, with a constant merry babble, a tiny stream. A busy, fussy stream it was, on its way to the beautiful little river that, in its turn, came rushing down through a mountain-gorge to the sea. I must tell you about this mountain-gorge some time, or, if you like, we shall visit it with Ted and his faithful companion, whom you have not yet heard about — his father's great big Scotch collie dog, Cheviott.

You don't know what a dear dog he was, so brave, but so gentle and considerate. He came of a brave and patient race, for you know "collies" are the famous Scotch sheep-dogs, who to their shepherd masters are more useful than any *two*-legged servant could be. And though I am not sure that "Chevie" himself had ever had to do with "the keeping of sheep," like gentle Abel of old, yet, no doubt, as a baby doggie in his northern home, he must have heard a good deal about it —

no doubt, if his tongue had had the power of speaking, he could have told his little master some strange stories of adventures and narrow escapes which had happened to members of his family. For up in the Border mountains where he was born, the storms sometimes come on so suddenly that shepherd and flock are all but lost, and but for their faithful collies, might never find their way home again. Often, too, in the early spring time, the poor little lambs go astray, or meet with some accident, such as being caught in the bushes and being unable to escape. What, then, would become of them but for their four-footed guardian, who summons aid before it is too late, and guides the gentle, silly lambkins and their mothers along the right paths? I think Ted's father and mother did well when they chose for their boy a collie like Cheviott for his companion.

Across the stream, just at the foot of the garden path which sloped down from the house, a couple of planks were placed as a bridge. A narrow bridge, and not a very firm one, it must be confessed, and perhaps for that very reason — because there was something a little risky and dangerous about it — Ted, true boy that he was, was particularly fond of crossing it. He liked to stand on it for a minute or two on the way, "jigging" up and down to feel the shaking and trembling of the planks, but that, of course, was only a kind

of playing with danger. I don't think he *would* have much liked a sudden tumble into the mischievous little brook's cold waters, very cold it would have felt, though it looked so browny bright and tempting. And many a bath in the brook Ted would have had, had Chevie been as much carried away by his spirits as his little master. For no sooner did the two set off running from the top of the sloping garden path, than Ted would call out, "A race, Chevie, a race! Who'll be at the bridge first?" And on he would run as fast as his sturdy wee legs could carry him, Cheviott bounding beside him with a great show of also doing *his* best. But — and wasn't this clever of Chevie? — just a little way on this side of the bridge he would — not stop short, for that might have disappointed Ted and made him feel as if they weren't having a *real* race, but go gradually more slowly, as if he felt he had no chance of gaining, so that little Ted always reached the bridge first, and stood shouting with glee and triumph. The first time or two that Ted's mother saw this little performance she had been frightened, for if the dog had gone on at full speed, or even only at luggage-train speed, beside the boy, he could not have avoided tumbling him into the brook. But for anything of this kind Cheviott was far too much of a gentleman, and after watching them once or twice, Ted's mother felt perfectly satisfied that the little man could not

be better taken care of than by his four-footed friend.

There was another friend, too, who could very well be trusted to take care of Ted, for though he had, of course, a very kind, good nurse in the house, nurses are not able to be the whole day long in the garden, nor are they always very fond of being much there. So, even though Ted was still quite a little boy, it was very nice for him to have two such good out-door friends as Cheviott and David the gardener, the other one I am going to tell you of.

It was a beautiful spring day. Ted woke up early, and thought to himself how nice and bright and sunny it was going to be in the garden. He was rather in a hurry to be dressed, for there were several things he was in a hurry to do, and the days, in summer time especially, never seemed long enough for all he had before him. Just now these summer days seemed really brimming over with nice things, for his big cousin Percy — at least he was what *Ted* counted a "big" cousin, and he was a good many years older than Ted — was with him for the holidays, and though Percy had some lessons to do, still they had a good deal of time together.

"Ted wonders if Percy is 'decked' yet," said Ted to his nurse. "Decked" was the word he always used for "dressed," and he was often made

fun of for using it. His mind was very full of Percy this morning, for he had only arrived the evening before, and besides the pleasure of having him with him, which was *always* a pleasure, there was the nice newness of it,—the things he had to show Percy, the tricks Chevie had learnt, big dog though he was, the letters and little words Ted had himself mastered since Percy was last there.

"I don't know that Master Percy will be ready quite so early this morning," said nurse. "He may be a little tired with travelling yesterday."

"Ted doesn't *zink* Percy will be tired," said Ted. "Percy wants to see the garden. Percy is *so* big, isn't he, nurse? Percy can throw sticks up in the sky *so* high. Percy throwed one up in the sky up to heaven, so high that it *never* comed down again."

"Indeed," said nurse; "are you quite sure of that, Master Ted? Perhaps it did come down again, but you didn't see it."

Nurse was a sensible person, you see. She did not all at once begin saying to Ted that he was talking nonsense, or worse still that he was telling stories. For very little children often "romance" in a sweet innocent way which has nothing whatever to do with story-telling—I mean *untruth*-telling, for it is better not to call untruths "stories," is it not? The world and the people in it, and the things they see and hear, are all new and

strange to the little creatures so lately started on their puzzling journey. What wonder that real and fancy are mixed up together sometimes — that it is difficult to understand that the pretty bluebells do not sometimes tinkle in the moonlight, or that there are no longer bears in the woods or fairies hidden among the grass? Perhaps it would be better for us if we were *more* ready to believe even such passed-by fancies, than to be so quick as we sometimes are to accuse others of wishing to deceive.

Ted looked at nurse thoughtfully.

"P'raps it did," he said. "P'raps it might have comed down again after Ted was a'leep."

"I dare say it caught in a tree or something of that kind," said nurse, as she finished brushing Ted's soft curls and lifted him off the chair on which he had been standing, just as Percy put his head in at the door to ask if Ted might have a run in the garden with him before breakfast.

"They're not down yet," said Percy, nodding his bright curly head in the direction of Ted's father's and mother's room; "they're not ready. Nurse, do let Ted come out with me for a bit before breakfast," and Ted trotted off, his hand in Percy's, in utmost content.

Was there ever so clever and kind and wonderful a big boy as Percy before? Was there ever one who knew so much about *everything* — cricket and

croquet and football; skating and fishing and climbing trees — things on earth and things in water — what was there he didn't know? These were the thoughts that were busy in Ted's little brain as he followed kind Percy about the garden, that bright summer morning, chattering incessantly, and yet ready enough to be silent when Percy took it into his head to relate to his tiny adorer some of his school experiences.

"Ted will go to school some day, Percy," he said half questioningly.

"Of course you will. I hope you'll come to my school if I've not left by then. I could look after you, you know, and see that they didn't bully you."

"What's 'bully'?" asked Ted.

"Oh, teasing, you know. Setting you down because you're a little chap, and all that. Knocking you about if you don't look sharp. All those kinds of things that big fellows do to small ones."

Ted opened his eyes. It was not very clear to him what Percy meant — it was a new idea, and would have distressed him greatly had he quite taken it in that big boys could be anything but good to little ones.

"Thoo doesn't knock Ted about, and thoo is big, Percy," he said, remonstratingly.

"No, of course I don't, but that's different. You're like my brother, you know."

"And bruvvers *couldn't* knock theirselves about," said Ted with an air of satisfaction.

"N-no, I suppose not," said Percy. Boy as he was, he felt somehow that he could not bear to destroy little Ted's beautiful faith. "But never mind about that just now," he added; "let's run down the bank and see how the cabbages and cauliflowers are getting on. They were just put in when I was here last;" and for some time both boys were intensely interested in examining the state of the vegetable beds.

"Ted likes f'owers best," said the child, after a few moments' silence. "When Ted — "

"Why don't you say 'I' and 'I like,' Teddy?" said Percy. "You're getting such a big boy — four years old."

"Ted *means* I," persisted the small man. "*I* sall have all f'owers in Ted's garden, when me is big."

Percy was obliged to leave off what he was about — hunting for the slugs and caterpillars among the cabbages — in order that he might stand still and laugh.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't get the prize for grammar at our school, Ted," he said. But Ted only laughed too.

"I haven't learnt grammar," he said slowly and distinctly. "But please, Percy, Ted doesn't like cabbages. Come and see the f'owers. There was

lots of c'ocodiles at that side. Ted likes zem best of all, but zem's done now."

"*Crocodiles*," said Percy. "What can crocodiles be?"

"Little f'owers with pointy leaves," said Ted. "P'raps it isn't c'ocodiles but somesing like coc —coco—"

"Crocuses perhaps," said Percy, as they made their way up to the house. "Yes, they're very pretty, but they're soon done."

"When I'm big I'll have a garden where they'll *never* be done," said Ted. "I'll have c'ocodiles and towslips for muzzer and—and—"

"Come in to breakfast, my man," called out his father from the dining-room. "What have you been about this morning?"

"We'se been in the garden," said Ted, "and Percy's been 'samining the cabbages. He's caught slugs upon slugs, worms upon worms, earwigs upon earwigs."

"My dear little boy," said Ted's father, though he couldn't help laughing, "you mustn't learn to exaggerate."

"What's 'saggerate?" began Ted, but looking round another idea caught him. "Where's muzzer?" he said suddenly.

"Mother is rather tired this morning," said his father. "Eat your breakfast, dear," and then he turned to talk to Percy and ask him questions as to how he was getting on at school.

For a minute or two neither of them noticed Ted. He sat quietly at his place, his bowl of bread and milk before him, but he made no attempt to eat it. Then Percy happened to see him.

"Aren't you hungry, Ted?" he said.

Ted looked up with his two blue eyes full of tears.

"Ses," he said, "Ted's hungry. But if muzzer doesn't come down Ted can't eat. Ted won't eat nothing all day, and he'll die."

"Not quite so bad as that," said his father quietly, for he did not want Ted to see that it was difficult not to smile at his funny way of speaking, "for see here is mother coming."

Ted danced off his seat with pleasure.

"It's dedful when thoo's not here," he said feelingly, and now the bread and milk was quickly despatched. "When I'm big," he continued, in the intervals of the spoonfuls, "I'll have a house as big — as big as a mountain," his eyes glancing out of the window, "and all the little boys in the world shall live there with all their favers and muzzers, and Percies, and everybodies, and nobody shall never go away, not to school or bidness, or nothing, so that they'll all be togever always."

Ted looked round for approval, and then took another spoonful.

"What a nice place you'll make of the world, my boy, when you're big," said his father.

"Ses," said Ted with satisfaction.

"But as that time hasn't come yet, I'm afraid I *must* go to my 'bidness,'" his father went on. For he had to go several times a week a good way into the country, to see that his men were all doing their work properly. "And Percy must go with me to-day," he went on, "for he needs some new clothes, and I shall be driving through A——," which was the nearest town to which they lived.

Percy's face looked very pleased, but Ted's grew rather sad.

"Never mind, Teddy," whispered Percy. "We'll have lots of days. You must have a good game with Chevie to keep up your spirits."

"And David is going to cut the grass to-day," said his father, "so you will have plenty of fun."

"But Ted must be careful," said his mother; "don't touch David's sharp tools, Ted. I was quite frightened the other day," she added; "Ted was trying to open and shut those great big shears for clipping the borders."

"Zem was sticked fast," said Ted. "Zem opens kite easy sometimes."

"Well, don't you touch them anyway," said his mother, laughing. But though Ted said "No," I don't feel sure that he really heard what his mother was saying. His wits were already off, I don't know where to — running after Cheviott perhaps,

or farther away still, up among the little clouds that were scudding across the blue sky that he caught sight of out of the window.

And then his father and Percy set off, and his mother went away about her housekeeping, sending Ted up to the nursery, and telling him that he might ask nurse to put his big blouse on, so that he might play about the garden without risk of soiling his clothes.

Ted felt, for him, a very little sad as he trotted out into the garden. He had hoped for such a nice merry day with Percy. But low spirits never troubled him long. Off he set with Cheviott for the race down to the little bridge, always the first bit of Ted's programme, and careful Chevie as usual pulled up in plenty of time to avoid any risk of toppling his master into the brook. Arrived on the bridge, Ted stood still and "jigged" a little as usual. Then he peered down at the shiny water with the bright brown pebbles sparkling up through it, and wondered what it would feel like to be a little fish.

"Little fisses," he said to himself, "always has each other to play with. They don't go to school, and they hasn't no bidness, nor no cooks that they must be such a long time ordering the dinners with, nor — nor beds to make and stockings to mend. I wish nurse would 'tum out this morning. Ted doesn't like being all alone. Ted would like

somebody littler to play with, 'cos then they wouldn't go to school or out d'ives with papa."

But just as he was thinking this, he caught sight of some one coming across the garden, and his ideas took another turn at once.

"David, old David," he cried, "is thoo going to cut the grass? Do let me come and help thoo, David."

And he ran back across the bridge again and made his way to David as fast as he could.

"Good-morning, Master Ted," said the gardener. "It is beautiful day, Master Ted, to be sure. Yes indeed."

"Ses," agreed Ted. "Good-morning, old David. I'm going to stay out in the garden a long time, a tevible long time, 'cos it's such a sprendid lovely day. What is thoo going to do, David? Can't Ted help thoo?"

"I am going to cut the grass, Master Ted, but I not be very long — no; for it is only the middle that's be cut. All the rest stand for hay, to be sure. Ay, indeed."

"And when will the hay be cuttened?" inquired Ted.

"That's be as Master order, and not as Master can choose neither — no," said David. "He not able to make for the sun to shine; no, indeed; nor the rain neither, — no."

"*Dod* sends rain and sun," said Ted, rever-

ently, but yet looking at David with a sort of curiosity.

"Well, indeed you are right, Master Ted. Yes, yes. But I must get on with my work. God gives us work to do, too; ay, indeed; and them as not work never expect to eat, no, never; they not care for their victual anyhow if they not work for it. No."

Ted looked rather puzzled. "Ted eats," he said, —"not victuals — Ted doesn't know that meat — but bread and butter, and tea, and potatoes, and rice pudding, and meat, and *sometimes* 'tawberry jam and apple pie and — and — lots of things. And Ted likes zem very much, but him doesn't work."

"I not know for that, Master Ted," said David, "is it all kinds of work; ay, indeed; and I see you very near always busy — dear me, yes; working very good, Master Ted — ay."

"I *like* to be busy. I wish thoo'd let me help thoo to cut the grass," said Ted, eyeing David wistfully, as he started his big scythe, for the old gardener knew nothing of mowing machines, and would most likely have looked upon them with great contempt. But he stopped short a moment to look down at wee Ted, staring up at him and wishing to be in his place.

"No, indeed, Master Ted *bach!*" he said; "you soon have your cliver little legs and arms cut to pieces, if you use with my scythe, Master Ted —

"I WISH THOO'D LET ME HELP THOO TO CUT THE GRASS." — p. 30.

ay, indeed, d'rectly. It look easy, to be sure, but it not so easy even for a cliver man like you, Master Ted — no, indeed. But I tell you what you shall do. You shall help to make the grass to a heaps, and then I put it in a barrow and wheel it off. Ay, indeed; that be the best."

This proposal was very much to Ted's taste. Chevie and he, at a safe distance from David's scythe, thought it great fun to toss about the soft fine grass and imagine they were helping David tremendously. And after a while, when Chevie began to think he had had enough of it, and with a sort of condescending growl by way of explanation, stretched himself out in the sunshine for a little forenoon sleep, David left off cutting, and, with Ted's help of course, filled the barrow and wheeled it off to the corner where the grass was to lie to be out of the way. It was beginning to be rather hot, though still quite early, and Ted's face grew somewhat red with his exertions as he ran beside David.

"You better ride now; jump in, Master Ted," said the gardener, when his barrow was empty. So he lifted him in and wheeled him back to the lawn, which was *quite* after Ted's own heart.

"Isn't thoo going to cut with thoo's big scissors?" said Ted after a while.

"It is want oiling," said David, "and I forget to do them. I shall leave the borders till after

dinner, — ay, sure," and he was going on with his scything when suddenly a voice was heard from the house calling him.

"David, David, you're wanted," said the voice, and then the cook made her appearance at the side of the house. "There's a note to take to ——."

They could not hear to where, but David had to go. He glanced round him, and, afraid of Ted's experiments, shouldered his scythe and walked off with it for fear of accidents.

"Are you going in, Master Ted?" he asked.

"Nurse is going to call me when she's ready," said Ted composedly, and knowing that the little fellow often played about by himself for a while, good David left him without any more anxiety. He had got his scythe safe, he never thought of the big pair of shears he had left lying in the grass!

Now these gigantic "scissors" as he called them had always had a wonderful attraction for Ted. He used to think how funny they would look beside the very tiny fine pair his mother worked with — the pretty scissors that lay in her little case lined with velvet and satin. Ted had not, in those days, heard of Gulliver and his strange adventures, but if he had, one might have imagined that to his fancy the two pairs of scissors were like a Brobdignag and a Lilliputian. And no sooner had David disappeared than unfortunately the great scissors caught his eyes.

"Zem's still sticked fast," he said to himself. "David says zem needs oil. Wiss I had some oil. P'raps the fissy oil to make Ted grow big would do. But the scissors is big enough. Ted wonders if the fissy oil would make zem bigger. Zem *couldn't* be much bigger."

Ted laughed a little to himself at the funny fancy. Then he sat and stared at the scissors. What did they remind him of? Ah yes, they were like the shears of "the great, long, red-legged scissor man," in the wonderful story of "Conrad Suck-a-thumb," in his German picture-book. Almost, as he gazed at them, it seemed to Ted that the figure of the scissors man would suddenly dart out from among the bushes and seize his property.

"But him wouldn't cut *Ted's* fumbs," thought the little man to himself, "'cos Ted *never* sucks zem. What a pity the scissors is sticked fast! Poor David can't cut with zem. P'raps Ted could oilen zem for poor David! Ted will go and get some fissy oil."

No sooner thought than done. Up jumped Ted, and was starting off to the house when a growl from Cheviott made him stop. The dog had just awakened, and seeing his little master setting off somewhere thought it his business to inquire where to and why. He lifted his head and gave it a sort of sleepy shake, then growled again, but gently of course.

"What did thoo say, Chevie?" said Ted. "Did thoo want to know where I was going? Stay here, Chevie. Ted will be back in a minute — him's on'y going to get some fissy oil to oilen poor David's scissors."

And off he set, though a third growl from Cheviott followed him as he ran.

"What does Chevie mean?" thought Ted. "P'raps him's thinking muzzer said Ted mustn't touch zem big scissors. But muzzer on'y meant Ted wasn't to cutten with zem. Muzzer would *like* Ted to help poor David," and, his conscience quite at rest, he trotted on contentedly.

CHAPTER III.

WISHES AND FEARS.

Children. "Here are the nails, and may we help?
Jessie. You shall if I should want help.
Children. Will you want it then?
Please want it — we like helping."

THERE was no one in the nursery, fortunately for Ted's plans. *Un*fortunately rather, we should perhaps say, for if nurse had been there, she would have asked for what he wanted the little bottle which had held the cod-liver oil, that he had lately left off taking, but of which a few drops still remained.

Ted climbed on to a chair and reached the shelf where it stood, and in two minutes he was off again, bottle in hand, in triumph. He found Cheviott lying still, where he had left him; he looked up and yawned as Ted appeared, and then growled with an air of satisfaction. It was sometimes a little difficult for Chevie to decide exactly how *much* care he was to take of Ted. After all, a little two-legged boy that could talk was not *quite* the same as a lamb, or even a sheep. He could not run round him barking, to prevent his trotting where he wished — there were plainly some things Ted

had to do with and understood which Chevie's dog-experience did not reach to.

So Cheviott lay there and blinked his honest eyes in the sunshine, and stared at Ted and wondered what he was after now! For Ted was in a very tip-top state of delight! He sat down cross-legged on the grass, drew the delicious big shears to him — they were heavy for him even to pull — and uncorking the bottle of "fissy" oil, began operations.

"Zem *is* sticked fast, to be soore," he said to himself, adopting David's favourite expression, as he tugged and tugged in vain. "If thoo could hold one side and Ted the other, they would soon come loosened," he observed to Cheviott. But Cheviott only growled faintly and blinked at his master sleepily, and after a good deal more tugging Ted did manage to open the shears, which indeed at last flew apart so sharply that the boy toppled over with the shock, and rolled for a moment or two on the grass, though happily not on the shears, before he recovered his balance.

Laughing merrily, he pulled himself up again. Luckily the bottle had not been overturned. Ted poured a drop or two carefully on to his fingers, quite regardless of the fishy smell, and proceeded to anoint the scissors. This he repeated several times, polishing them all over till they shone, but not understanding that *the* place where the oil was

needed was the hinge, he directed the best of his attention to the general shininess.

Then he sat and looked at them admiringly.

"*Won't* David be p'eased?" he said. "Zem's oilened all over now. Ted must see if they don't sticken fast now."

With nearly as much difficulty as he had had to open them, Ted now managed to shut them.

"Zem's better," thought the busy little man, "but Ted must see how they cut."

He laid them flat on the grass, at a place where the blades had not been completely sheared by the scythe. Tug number one — the oil had really done some good, they opened more easily — tug number two, behold them gaping — tug number three, they bite the grass, and Ted is just going to shout in triumph when a quick shock of pain stabs through him. He had been kneeling almost *on* the shears, and their cruel jaws had snipped, with the grass, the tender fleshy part of his poor little leg!

It was not the pain that frightened him so much as the feeling held fast by the now dreadful scissors.

"David, David," he cried, "oh, please come. Nurse, please come. Ted has cuttened hisself."

His little voice sounded clear and shrill in the summer quiet of the peaceful garden, and nurse, who had been hastening to come out to him, heard it from the open window. David too was on his way back, and poor Ted was soon released. But it

was a bad cut — he had to be carried into the house to have it bathed and sponged and tenderly bound up by mother's fingers. He left off crying when he saw how sorry mother looked.

"Ted is *so* sorry to t'ouble thoo," he said.

"And mother is sorry for Ted," she replied. "But, my dear little boy," she went on, when the poor leg was comfortable and its owner forgetting its pain on mother's knee, "don't you remember that mother told you not to touch David's tools?"

"Oh ses," he replied. "Ted wouldn't touch zem for hisself, but it was to *help David*," and the innocent confidence with which he looked up in her face went to his mother's heart.

"But *still*, dear Ted, you must try to understand that what mother says, you must do exactly. Mother likes you to be kind and helping to people, but still mother knows better than you, and that is why, when she tells you things, you must remember to do what she says."

Ted looked grave and a little puzzled, and seeing this his mother thought it best to say no more just then. The lesson of obedience was one that Ted found rather puzzling, you see, but what his mother had said had made a mark in his mind. He thought about it often, and as he grew bigger other things happened, as you will hear, to make him think of it still more.

It was rather a trial to Ted not to be able to run about as usual that afternoon, for had he done so, the cut might have begun to bleed again, so he had to sit still in the nursery, looking out at the window and hoping and hoping that Percy would soon come back. Once David and his barrow passed underneath, and the gardener called up to know if Master Ted's leg was better. Ted shook his head rather dolefully.

"Him's better," he said, "but Ted can't run about. Ted's so sad, David. Muzzer's got letters to write and Percy's out."

A kind thought struck David. He went round to the drawing-room window and tapped at it gently. Ted's mother was writing there. Might he wheel Master Ted in his barrow to the part of the garden where he was working?—he would take good care of him—"the little gentleman never cut himself if I with him—no, indeed; I make him safe enough."

And Ted's mother consented gladly. So in a few minutes he was comfortably installed on a nice heap of dry grass, with Cheviott close beside him and David near at hand.

"You never touch my tools again, Master Ted, for a bit; no, to be sure, do you now?" said David.

"No," said Ted. "Muzzer says I mustn't. But wasn't the big scissors nicely oilened, David?"

"Oh, fust rate — ay," said David. "Though I not say it is a cliver smell — no. I not like the smell, Master Ted."

"Never mind," replied Ted reassuringly. "Ted will ask muzzer for some cock-alone for thoo. Thoo can put some on the scissors."

"What's that, Master Ted?" inquired David, who was not at all above getting information out of his little master.

"Cock-alone," repeated Ted. "Oh, it's somesing that smells very nice. I don't know what it is. I thing it must be skeesed out of f'owers. I'll run and get thoo some now, David, this minute," and he was on the point of clambering to his feet when the stiff feeling of his bandaged leg stopped him. "Oh, I forgot," he exclaimed regretfully.

"Yes indeed, Master Ted. You not walk a great deal to-day, to be sure — no, indeed — for a bit; ay."

Ted lay still for a minute or two. He was gazing up at the sky, which that afternoon was very pure and beautiful.

"Who paints the sky, David?" he said suddenly.

"Well indeed, Master Ted, I not think you ask me such a foolis' question, Master Ted *bach!*" said David. "Who's make a sky and a sea and everything so?"

"Dod," said Ted. "Oh, I know that. But I thoughtened p'raps Dod put somebody up there to paint it. It was *so* pitty last night, David — *all*

tolours — Ted tan't say zem all. Why isn't there many tolours now, David?"

"I not know for sure," said David, stopping a moment in his work and looking up at the sky.

"Ted *thought*," continued the little fellow slowly, "Ted *thought* p'raps Dod's paints was getting done. Could that be why?"

David was rather matter-of-fact, and I don't know that that made him any the worse a companion for Ted, whose brain was already quite full enough of fancies. So he did not smile at Ted's idea, but answered quite gravely,

"No indeed, Master Ted, I not think that untall."

"If on'y Ted could fly," the child continued in a minute or two, as just then a flock of birds made their graceful way between his gazing eyes and the clear blue vault above. "How pittily birds flies, don't they, David? If Ted could fly he'd soon find out all about the sky and everysing. And it wouldn't matter then that him had hurt his leg. *Couldn't* Ted learn to fly, David?"

Ted was soaring too far above poor David's head already for him to know what to answer. What could he say but "No indeed, Master Ted," again? He had never heard tell of any one that could fly except the angels. For David was fond of going to church, or chapel rather, and though he could not read Ted's Bible, he could read his own very well.

"Angels," said Ted. The word started his busy fancy off in a fresh direction. He lay looking up still, watching now the lovely little feathery clouds that began to rise as the sun declined, and fancying they were angels with wings softly floating hither and thither in the balmy air. He watched one little group, which seemed to him like three angels with their arms twined together, so long, that at last his eyes grew rather tired of watching and their little white blinds closed over them softly. Little Ted had fallen asleep.

"So, so; dear me, he tired," said old David, as, surprised at the unusual silence, he turned to see what Ted was about. "Bless him, he tired very bad with his cliver talk and the pain; ay — but, indeed, he not one to make fuss — no. He a brave little gentleman, Master Ted — ay, indeed," and the kind old man lifted the boy's head so that he should lie more comfortably, and turned his wheelbarrow up on one side to shade him from the sun.

Ted smiled in his sleep as David looked at him. Shall I tell you what made him smile? In his sleep he had got his wish. He dreamt that he was flying. This was the dream that came to him.

He fancied he was running down the garden path with Chevie, when all at once Chevie seemed to disappear, and where he had been there stood a pretty snow-white lamb. With an eager cry Ted darted forward to catch it, and laid his hand

on its soft woolly coat, when — it was no lamb but a little cloud he was trying to grasp. And wonderful to say, the little cloud seemed to float towards him and settle itself on his shoulders, and then all of himself Ted seemed to find out that it had turned into wings!

"Ted can fly, Ted can fly!" he cried with delight, or *thought* he cried. In reality it was just then that David lifted his head, and feeling himself moving, Ted fancied it was the wings lifting him upward, and gave the pleased smile which David noticed. Fly! I should think so. He mounted and mounted, higher and higher, the white wings waving him upwards in the most wonderful way, till at last he found himself right up in the blue sky where he had so wished to be. And ever so many — lots and lots of other little white things were floating or flying about, and, looking closely at them, Ted saw that they were not little clouds as they seemed at first, but wings — all pairs of beautiful white wings, and dear little faces were peeping out from between them. They were all little children like himself.

"Come and play, Ted, come and play. Ted, *Ted*, TED!" they cried so loud, that Ted opened his eyes — his real waking eyes, not his dream ones — sharply, and there he was, lying on the soft grass heap, not up in the sky among the cloud-children at all!

At first he was rather disappointed. But as he was thinking to himself whether it was worth while to try to go to sleep again and go on with his dream, he heard himself called as before, "Ted, *Ted*, TED."

And looking up he forgot all about everything else when he saw, running down the sloping banks as fast as his legs would carry him, Percy, his dear Percy!

Ted jumped up — even his wounded leg couldn't keep him still now.

"Was it thoo calling me, Percy?" he said. "I was d'eaming, do thoo know — *such* a funny d'eam? But I'm so glad thoo's come back, Percy. Oh, Ted *is* so glad."

Then all the day's adventures had to be related — the accident with the scissors and the drive in the wheelbarrow, and the funny dream. And in his turn Percy had to tell of all he had seen and done and heard — the shops he had been at in the little town, and what he had had for luncheon and — and — the numberless trifles that make up the interest of a child's day.

"Does thoo think there's any shop where we could get *wings*, Percy?" asked Ted. He had the vaguest ideas as to what "shops" were, but Percy had been telling him of the beautiful little boats he had seen at a toy-shop in the market-place, "boats with white sails and all rigged just like

real ones;" and if boats with white sails were to be got, why not white wings?

"Wings!" exclaimed Percy. "What sort of wings do you mean, Teddy?"

"Wings for little boys," Ted explained. "Like what I was d'eaming about. It would be so nice to fly, Percy."

"Beautiful, wouldn't it?" agreed Percy. "But nobody can fly, Ted. Nobody *could* make wings that would be any use for people. People can't fly."

"But little boys, Percy," persisted Ted. "Little boys isn't so very much bigger than birds. Oh, you don't know how *lovely* it feels to fly. Percy, *do* let us try to make some wings."

But Percy's greater experience was less hopeful.

"I'm afraid it would be no use," he said. "People have often tried. I've heard stories of it. They only tumbled down."

"Did they hurt themselves?" asked Ted.

"I expect so," Percy replied.

Just then David, who was passing by, stopped to tell the boys that some one was calling them in from the house.

"Is it your papa, Master Ted; yes, I think," he said.

Ted's leg was feeling less stiff and painful now. He could walk almost as well as usual. When they got to the house-door his father was waiting for him. He had heard of Ted's misfortune, and

there was rather a comical smile on his face as he stooped to kiss his little boy.

"I want you to come in to see Mr. Brand," he said. "He says he hasn't seen you for a long time, little Ted."

Ted raised his blue eyes to his father's face with a rather puzzled expression.

"Whom's Mr. Brand?" he asked.

"Why, don't you remember him, Teddy?" said Percy. "That great big gentleman — so awfully tall."

Ted did not reply, but he seemed much impressed.

"Is him a diant?" he asked, gravely.

"Very nearly, I should say," said Percy, laughing, and then, as he had already seen Mr. Brand, who had met Ted's father on his way back from A——, Percy ran off in another direction, and Ted followed his father into the drawing-room.

Mr. Brand was sitting talking to Ted's mother, but just as the door opened, he rose from his seat and came forward.

"I was just going to ask you if — ah! here's your little boy," he said to Ted's father. Then, sitting down again, he drew Ted between his knees and looked kindly at the small innocent face. He was very fond of children, but he did not know much about them, and Ted, looking and feeling rather overawed, stood more silently than usual, staring seriously at the visitor.

He was very tall and very big. Whether he quite came up to Ted's idea of a "diant" I cannot tell. But queer fancies began to chase each other round the boy's brain. There had been a good deal to excite and upset the little fellow — at no time a strong child — that day, and his dream when lying asleep on the grass had added to it all. And now, as he stood looking up at big Mr. Brand, a strange confusion of ideas filled his mind — of giants tall enough to reach the sky, to catch and bring down some of the cloud-wings Ted wished so for, interspersed with wondering if it was "fissy oil" that had made this big man so very big. If he, Ted, were to take a great, great lot of fissy oil, would *he* grow as big and strong? Would he be able to cut the grass like David perhaps, to run faster than Percy — to — to I don't know what — for at this moment Mr. Brand's voice brought him back from his fancies.

"What an absent-minded little fellow he is," Mr. Brand was saying, for he had been speaking to Ted two or three times without the child's paying any attention.

"Not generally," said Ted's mother. "He is usually very wide-awake to all that is going on. What are you thinking of, Ted, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Brand. "Tell us what you've got in your head. Are you thinking that I'm a very tiny little man — the tiniest little man you ever saw?"

"No," said Ted solemnly, without the least smile, at which his mother was rather surprised. For, young though he was, Ted was usually very quick at seeing a joke. But he just said "No," and stared again at Mr. Brand, without another word.

"Then what were you thinking — that I'm the very *biggest* man you ever did see?"

"Ses," said Ted, gravely still, but with a certain light in his eyes which encouraged Mr. Brand to continue his questions.

"And what more? Were you wishing you were as big as I am?"

Ted hesitated.

"I'd *rather* fly," he said. "But Percy says nobody can fly. I'd like to be big if I could get up very high."

"How high?" said Mr. Brand. "Up to the top of the mountain out there?"

"Is the mountain as high as the clouds?" asked Ted.

"Yes," said Mr. Brand; "when you're up at the very top, you can look down on the clouds."

Ted looked rather puzzled.

"I'll tell you what," the gentleman went on, amused by the expression of the child's face, "I'll tell you what — as I'm so big, supposing I take you to the top of the mountain — we'll go this very afternoon. I'll take a jug of cold water and a loaf of bread, and leave it with you there so

that you'll have something to eat, and then you can stay there quite comfortable by yourself and find out all you want to know. You'd like that, wouldn't you? to be all by yourself on the top of the mountain?"

He looked at Ted in a rather queer way as he said it. The truth was that Mr. Brand, who though so big was not very old, was carried away by the fun (to *him*) of watching the puzzled look on the child's face, and forgot that what to him was a mere passing joke might be very different to the tender little four-years-old boy.

Ted's face grew rather white, he edged away a little from this strange gentleman, whom he could not make out, but who was so big that Ted felt it impossible to doubt his being able to do anything he wished.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he repeated, quite gravely, and glancing at Ted with slightly knitted brows which made the boy suddenly think of some of the "ogre" stories he had heard.

"No," said Ted bluntly. But he was afraid to say more. Ogres didn't like to be contradicted, and perhaps — *perhaps* this strange man really thought he *would* like it, and really meant to please him. Anyway, it would never do to answer rudely, though Ted's face grew still paler, when his glance fell on the mountain peak clearly to be seen out of the window from where he stood, and

a little shiver ran through him when he thought that perhaps he would have to go, whether he liked it or not. He edged away still farther, but it was no use. Mr. Brand had put his arm round him, and there was no getting away, when suddenly a noise outside the window caught the gentleman's attention and he started up. It was his dog barking loudly, and Mr. Brand, fearing he might have got into some mischief, stepped out through the glass door to see. Ted was on the alert, and before any one in the room had noticed him he was off.

Where should he go to? He dared not hide in the garden, for there he might be seen, especially as Mr. Brand was running about after his dog; he would not go up to the nursery, for nurse would ask him why he had not stayed downstairs; he did not even wish to find Percy, for though he could not have explained why, he felt that it would be impossible for him to tell *any one* of the strange terror that Mr. Brand's joke had awakened. He felt ashamed of it, afraid too that if, as he vaguely thought might be the case, the offer had been made in real earnest and with a wish to please him, his dislike to it would be ungrateful and unkind. Indeed poor Ted was more troubled than he ever remembered to have been in his whole little life — he could think of nothing for it but to hide till all danger was past.

A brilliant idea struck him — he would go and

pay a visit to cook! It was not very often he went into the kitchen, and no one would look for him there. And cook was kind, very kind when not very busy. So with a slight shudder as, running past the open front-door, he caught sight of the well-known mountain peak, frowning at him, as it seemed now, for the first time in his life, Ted made his way to cook's quarters.

She was not in the kitchen, but hearing some one coming, she called out from the back kitchen where she was. That was better still, every step the farther from the drawing-room, or from Mr. Brand rather, was a gain. So Ted trotted into the back kitchen, and to prevent cook's thinking there was anything the matter asked her if he might play with the cat. He found a piece of string, to which cook tied a cork, and as pussy was really more of a kitten than a cat, he amused himself for some time by making her run after it, whistling now and then to keep up his heart, though had cook looked at him closely she could have seen how white he was, and how every now and then he threw frightened glances over his shoulder.

"Your leg's better, Master Ted?" said cook.

"Oh ses, zank thoo," said Ted. "Him's much better."

"You'll have to take care never to touch sharp tools again, won't you?" she went on, as she bustled about with her work.

"Ses," he said again. But he did not speak with his usual heartiness, and cook, who, like all the servants, loved the bright, gentle little fellow, looked at him rather anxiously. Suddenly a sound was heard — wheels on the gravel drive.

"What's that, cook?" said Ted, starting.

"Only the gentleman's dog-cart — the gentleman that's been to see your papa. He's going away," said cook composedly.

Ted hurried into the kitchen. From the window the drive could be seen by big people, though not by him.

"Lift me up on the table, please, cook," he said, and when cook good-naturedly did so, and he saw the giant really, actually driving away, Ted could almost have cried with pleasure. But his fears and his relief he kept in his own little heart.

"Zank thoo, cook," he said gravely, but with the pretty courtesy he never forgot. "Zank thoo, and please lift me down again."

"He's a funny little fellow," said cook to herself, as she watched Ted trot off. "I wonder what he'd got in his mind, bless him."

Ted reappeared in the drawing-room.

"Where have you been, dear?" said his mother. "We were looking about for you to say good-bye to Mr. Brand. Where did you go to?"

"Ted were in the kitchen, 'peaking to cook," he replied.

"But why did you go away, dear, while Mr. Brand was here?" asked his mother. "Were you frightened of his dog?"

"No," said Ted, "Ted's never frightened of dogs."

"No, dear, I know you're not," said his mother. But she did not feel satisfied. Her little boy did not look the same as usual somehow. Still she felt it was better to ask no more — after a while Ted would perhaps tell her of himself. And she did well, for it would have been almost impossible for him to tell his mingled feelings.

"Muzzer likes that big man," he was thinking to himself. "Muzzer thinks he's kind. It's naughty and unkind of Ted to be frightened," and so the loyal little man kept silence.

And it was not for a long time — not till Ted himself had learnt to "understand" a little better, that even his mother understood the whole.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF SUNNY.

"Of course he was the giant,
With beard as white as snow."

BUT whenever Mr. Brand, poor man, came to call, Ted was sure in some mysterious way to disappear. After a while his mother began to notice it, though, as Mr. Brand did not come very often, she did not do so all at once. She noticed, however, another thing which she was sorry for. Ted took a dislike to the big mountain. It was a great pity, for before that he had been so fond of it—so fond of watching the different expressions, "looks" Ted called them, that it wore according to the time of day, or the time of year, or the weather. And his father and mother had been pleased to see him so "noticing," for such a little boy; they thought it showed, as indeed it did, that he was likely to grow into a happy-minded and happy-hearted man.

But now it was quite different. When he sat on his mother's knee in the drawing-room he would turn his little face to the side away from the window so that he should not see the towering mountain-head. He would never laugh at his old

friend's putting on his nightcap of mist, as he used to do, and all his pretty fancies about being able to reach the dear little stars if he were up on the top peak of all, were spoilt.

"Something has frightened Ted," said his mother to his father one day. "I wonder what it can be. I know *you* wouldn't frighten him, dear," she added, turning to Percy who was in the room, though of course *Ted* was not there, otherwise his mother would not have said it, "but still, has there been anything in your play that could have done so? Have you been talking about mountains, or telling stories about them?"

"No," said Percy, thoughtfully; "I'm sure there has been nothing. Shall I ask Ted about it? Perhaps he wouldn't mind telling me, not even as much as —" Percy stopped and grew a little red. He was a boy of nice feelings, not rough and knock-about in his ways like many schoolboys.

"Not even as much as telling *me*, you were going to say," said Ted's mother, smiling. "Never mind, dear. I dare say it *would* be easier for him to tell you, and I am very glad my little boy has such a kind Percy to talk to. But I think perhaps it is better to say nothing to him. We may find it out by degrees, and if it is only a sort of fancy — he may have seen the mountain looking gloomy some evening — it may fade away of itself more quickly if we don't notice it."

That day was a very bright and lovely one. Ted's mother thought to herself she would like to do something to make Ted, and Percy too, "extra" happy, for the weeks had been running on fast — it would soon be time for Percy, not being a little fish, to go back to school. And Percy's big sister was with them too just then. She was even bigger than Percy, so of course Ted thought her *quite* grown up, though in reality she was a good many years off being so. She was very nice anyway, with a gentle pretty face and kind eyes, and though she was not very old she was very clever at telling stories, which is a most delightful thing in a big sister or cousin — is it not? And she was also able to sing very prettily, another delightful thing, or at least so Ted thought, for he *was* so fond of singing. This big girl's name was Mabel.

And after thinking a while and talking about it to Mabel, Ted's mother thought the nicest thing would be to have tea in a lonely little nesty place in the gorge between the mountains that I have told you of. We were to go there with Ted and Cheviott some day, by the bye, were we not? Well, never mind, Cheviott shall be — that is to say he *was* — of the gipsy tea-party, so that will come to the same thing, will it not?

They all set off — Ted's father and mother, another gentleman and lady who were staying for the summer in a cottage not far off, that they might be near their

friends, their daughter who was *really* grown up, and Mabel and Percy and Ted. You can fancy the bread and butter there was to cut, the home-made cake, the tea and sugar and cream that must not be forgotten. And when all the baskets were ready and everybody was helping and planning how to carry them, who do you think got hold of the biggest of all and was trying to lug it along? Who but our four-years-old Ted?

"My boy, my boy," cried his mother, laughing, for he did look comical — the basket being really very nearly as big as himself and his little face already quite red with the exertion, "you cannot possibly take that basket. Why, *I* could scarcely carry it."

"But boys is stronger than muzzers," said Ted gravely, and it was really with difficulty that they could persuade him to give it up, and only then by letting him carry another which *looked* nearly as important but was in reality much lighter, as it only held the tablecloth and the teapot and teaspoons.

I have not told you about the gorge — not told you, I mean, how lovely it was. Nor if I talked about it for hours could I half describe its beauty. In spring time perhaps it was the prettiest of all, for then it was rich in the early blossoms and flowers that are so quickly over, and that seem to us doubly precious after the flower famine of the winter. But not even in the early spring time, with all the

beauty of primroses and violets, could the gorge look lovelier than it did this summer afternoon. For the ferns and bracken never seemed dusty and withered in this favoured place — the grass and moss too, kept their freshness through all the hot days as if tended by fairy fingers. It was thanks to the river you see — the merry beautiful little river that came dancing down the centre of this mountain-pass, at one part turning itself into a waterfall, then, as if tired, for a little flowing along more quietly through a short space of less precipitous road. But always beautiful, always kindly and generous to the happy dwellers on its banks, keeping them cool in the hottest days, tossing here and there its spray of pearly drops as if in pretty fun.

On each side of the water ran a little footpath, and here and there roughly-made rustic bridges across it tempted you to see if the other side was as pretty as this, though when you had stood still to consider about it you found it impossible to say! The paths were here and there almost completely hidden, for they were so little trodden that the moss had it all its own way with them, and sometimes too it took a scramble and a climb to fight one's way through the tangled knots and fallen fragments of rock which encumbered them. But now and then there came a bit of level ground where the gorge widened slightly, and then the path stopped for a while in a sort of glade from which again it emerged

on the other side. It was in one of these glades that Ted's mother arranged the gipsy tea. Can you imagine a prettier place for a summer day's treat? Overhead the bluest of blue skies and sunshine, tempered by the leafy screen-work of the thickly growing trees; at one side the soft rush of the silvery river, whose song was here low and gentle, though one could hear in the distance the boom of the noisy waterfall; at the other side the mountain slope, whose short brown slippery turf seemed to tempt one to a climb. And close at hand the wealth of ferns and bracken and flowers that I have told you of — a little higher up strange gleaming balls of many kinds of fungus, yellow and orange, and even scarlet, flamed out as if to rival the softer tints of the trailing honeysuckle and delicate convolvulus and pink foxglove below. It was a lovely dream of fairyland, and the knowing that not far away the waves of the broad blue sea were gently lapping the sandy shore seemed somehow to make it feel all the lovelier.

The tea of course was a great success — when was a gipsy tea, unless people are *very* cross-tempered and fidgety and difficult to please, anything else? The kettle did its duty well, for the water boiled in it beautifully on the fire of dry sticks and leaves which Percy and Mabel, and busy Ted *of course*, had collected. The tea tasted very good — "not 'moky at all," said Ted; the slices of bread and butter and

cake disappeared in a wonderful way, till at last everybody said "No, thank you, not any more," when the boys handed round the few disconsolate-looking pieces that remained.

And after this there was the fun of washing up and packing away, in which Ted greatly distinguished himself. He would not leave the least shred of paper or even crumbs about, for the fairies would be angry, he said, if their pretty house wasn't left "kite tidy." And Percy and Mabel were amused at his fancy, and naturally enough it set them talking about fairies and such like. For the children were by themselves now — the ladies had gone on a little farther to a place where Ted's mother wanted to sketch, and the gentlemen had set off to climb to the nearest peak, from whence there was a beautiful view of the sea. It would have been too much for Ted, and indeed when his father had asked him if he would like to go part of the way with them, both his mother and Percy noticed that a troubled look came over his happy face, as he said he would rather stay where he was, which was strange for him, for though such a little boy, he was always eager for a climb and anxious to do whatever he saw any one else doing. So kind Percy, mindful of Ted's mother's words, said he would not go either, and stayed with the others, helping them to tidy up the fairies' house.

"Now," said Ted at last, sitting down on the

grass at Mabel's feet, "now I *sink* the fairies will be p'eased. It's all kite tidy. Fairies is always angry if peoples is untidy."

"I thought fairies were always in a good humour," said Percy. "I didn't know they were ever angry."

"Oh, I think Ted's right," said Mabel. "They are angry with people who are dirty or untidy. Don't you remember a story about them coming to work in a house where the kitchen was always left tidy at night? And they never would come to the next house because it was always in a mess."

"P'ease tell me that story, Mabel," said Ted.

"I'm afraid I don't remember it very well," she replied.

"Do you remember," said Percy, who was lying on the ground staring up at the sky and the bit of brown mountain peak that could be seen from where he was, "do you remember, Mab, the story of a little boy that fell asleep on the top of a mountain, and the fairies spirited him away, and took him down to their country, down inside the mountain? And he thought he had only been away — when he came home again, I mean, for they had to let him out again after a while — he thought he had only been away a day or two, and, fancy, it had been twenty years! All the children had grown big, and the young people middle-aged, and the middle-aged people quite old, and none of them knew him again. He had lost all his childhood. Wasn't it sad?"

"Yes, *very*," said Mabel; "I remember the story."

"I think it's dedful," said Ted. "I don't like mountains, and I don't like diants. I'll never go up a mountain, never."

"But it wasn't the mountain's fault, Ted," said Percy. "And it wasn't giants, it was fairies."

"I sink p'raps it was diants," persisted Ted. "I don't like zem. Mr. Brand is a diant," he added mysteriously, in a low voice.

Percy had been thinking of what Ted's mother had said. Now he felt sure that it was something to do with Mr. Brand that had frightened the little fellow. But Mabel did not know about it.

"I like mountains," she said. "Indeed I love them. I am always so glad to live where I can see their high peaks reaching up into the sky."

"But it wouldn't be nice to be alone, kite alone, on the top of one of zem, would it?" said Ted.

"No, it wouldn't be nice to be alone in any far-off place like that," said Percy, "but of course nobody would ever stay up on the top of a mountain alone."

"But if zem was *made* to," said Ted doubtfully. "I wouldn't mind so much if I had Chevie," he added, putting his arm round the dear doggie's neck and leaning his little fair head on him, for of course Chevie was of the party.

"Poor Ted," said Percy, laughing. "No one would ever make *you* live up all alone on the top of a mountain. Mabel, I wish you'd tell us a story," he

said to his sister. "It's so nice here. I shall go to sleep if somebody doesn't do something to keep me awake."

He was lying at full length on the soft mossy grass in the same place still, and gazing up at the blue sky and brown mountain peak. "Tell us a story, Mab," he repeated lazily.

"I haven't got any very nice ones just now," said Mabel. "I have been so busy with my lessons, you know, Percy, that I haven't had time for any stories."

"Can't you make them up yourself?" said Percy.

"Sometimes I do, a little," she replied. "But I can't make them all quite myself. Sometimes in our German reading-books there are funny little bits of stories, and I add on to them. There was one — oh yes, I'll tell you one about a giant who lived on the top of a mountain."

Ted drew nearer to Mabel, and nestled in to her side.

"A diant on the top of a mountain," he repeated. "Is it very f'ightening, Mabel?"

"Oh no. Listen and I'll tell you. Once, a long time ago, there was, a long way off, a strange country. There were lots and lots of forests in it, and at the side of the biggest forest of all there rose a chain of high mountains. The people who lived in this forest were poor, simple sort of people — they hadn't much time for anything but work, for it was difficult to gain enough to live on. Most of them

were charcoal-burners, and there were not very many of them altogether. Of course in a forest there wouldn't be much room for cottages and houses, would there? And their cottages were none of them near together. Each family had its own hut, quite separated from the others, and unless you belonged to the forest you could hardly find your way from one part of it to the other. The poor people, too, were so busy that they had not much time for going to see each other, or for amusing themselves in any way. They all had a pale sad look, something like the look that I have heard papa say the poor people in some parts of England have — the people in those parts where they work so awfully hard in dark smoky towns and never see the sun, or the green fields, or anything fresh and pretty. Of course the forest people were not as badly off as *that* — for their work anyway was in the open air, and the forest was clean — not like dirty factories, even though it was so dark. It was the want of sunshine that was their worst trouble, and that gave them that white, dull, half-frightened look. The forest was too thick and dense for the sun to get really into it, even in winter, and then, of course, the rays are so thin and pale that they aren't much good if they do come. And the mountains at the side came so close down to the edge of the forest that there was no getting any sunshine there either, for it was the north side there, the side that the sunshine couldn't get to. So for

these reasons the place had come to be called 'the sunless country.'"

"What was there at the other side of the forest?" said Percy; "couldn't they have got into the sunshine at that side?"

"No," said Mabel. "I think there was a river or something. Or else it was that the forest was so very, very big that it would have been quite a journey to get out at any other side. I think that was it. Anyway they couldn't. And they just had to live on without sunshine as well as they could. Their fathers had done so before them, and there was no help for it, they thought. They were too poor and too hard-worked to move away to another country, or to do anything but just go through each day as it came in a dull sad way, seldom speaking even to each other.

"But do you know, it had *not* always been so in the sunless forest, though the better times were so long ago that hardly any of the poor people knew it had ever been different. There had, once upon a time, been a way into the sunshine on the other side of the mountain, and this way lay right through the great hill itself. But the mountain belonged to a great and very powerful giant" — at this Ted edged still closer to Mabel — "who lived in it quite alone. Sometimes he used to come out at a hole in the top, which was his door, and stay up there for a while looking about him, staring at the black forest down

at his feet, and smiling grimly to himself at the thought of how dark and dull it must be for the people who lived in it. For he was not a kind giant at all. It was he that had shut up the passage through which the poor forest people used to pass to their bright cottages on the other side, for in those days they didn't *live* in the forest, they only went there for their work, and on Sundays and holidays they were all happy and merry together, and the little children grew up rosy and bright, quite different from the poor little wan-faced creatures that now hung sadly about at the hut doors in the forest, looking as if they didn't know how to laugh or play."

"Why did the naughty diant shut up the way?" asked Ted.

"Because he had a quarrel with the forest people. He wanted them to let their little boys and girls, or some of them, come to him to be his servants, but they wouldn't, and so he was so angry that he shut up the door. But that was so long ago now that the people had almost forgotten about it — the children that the giant had wanted to be his servants were old grandfathers and grandmothers now, and some of them were dead, I dare say, so that the real history of their troubles was forgotten by them but not by the giant, for whenever he came out at the top of the mountain to take some air, he used to look down at the forest and think how dull and miserable they must be there."

"Nasty diant," said Ted.

"Yes, he was very unkind, but still I think you would have been rather sorry for him too. He was old and all alone, and of course nobody loved him. The people in the forest hardly ever spoke of him. They knew he was there, or that he used to be there, and now and then some of the children who had heard about him used to feel afraid of him and whisper to each other that he would eat them up if he could catch them, but that was about all the notice they took of him. They seemed to have forgotten that he was the cause of their sad, gloomy lives, and indeed I am not sure that any except some very old people really knew. Among these very old people there were a man and his wife who were almost the poorest of all in the forest. They were so poor because they were almost past work, and they had no children to work for them. All that they had was a little granddaughter, who lived with them because her father and mother were dead. And it was a queer thing that she was quite different from the other poor children in the forest. They were all pale and sad and crushed-looking like their parents. This little girl was bright-haired and bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked. She was the one merry happy creature in the forest, and all the poor people used to stand and look at her as she flitted about, and wish that their children were the same. I don't know what her real name was; the story

didn't tell, but the name she got to have among the forest people was Sunshine — at least it was Sunshine in German, but I think 'Sunny' is a nicer name, don't you?"

"Yes," said Percy; and

"Ses," said Ted, "'Sunny' is nicest."

"Well, we'll call her 'Sunny.' The reason that she was so different was partly that she hadn't been born in the forest. Her father, who was the son of these old people, had gone away, as some few of the forest people did, to another country, and there he had married a bright-haired, pretty girl. But she had died, and he himself got very ill, and he had only strength to bring his baby girl back to the forest to his parents when he too died. So Sunny's history had been rather sad, you see, but still it hadn't made *her* sad — it seemed as if the sunshine was *in* her somehow, and that nothing could send it away."

Mabel stopped. Voices and steps were heard coming near.

"They're coming back," she said. "I'll have to finish the story another time. I didn't think it would take so long to tell."

"Oh *do* go on now, dear, dear Mabel, oh *do!*" cried Ted beseechingly.

But Mabel's fair face grew red.

"I couldn't, Ted, dear," she said, "not before big people," and Percy sympathised with her.

"We'll hear the rest in the garden at home," he said.

"Thoo won't tell it without me, not without Ted, p'ease," asked the little fellow.

"No, no, of course not, darling," said Mabel as she kissed his eager face.

Just then a ray of bright evening sunshine fell on Ted's brown hair, lighting it up and deepening it to gold, and as the little fellow caught it in his eyes, he looked up laughing.

"There's Sunny kissing Ted too," he said merrily.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF SUNNY (*Concluded*).

"A child of light, a radiant lass,
And cheerful as the morning air."

THEY were all three laughing at Ted's wit when his mother and the other ladies came upon them.

"You seem very happy, children," said she.

"Oh ses," said Ted. "Mabel has been telling us such a lovely story. It's not finnied yet. She's going to tell the rest in the garden at home. Oh, I *am* so happy. It's been such a sprendid day."

He began half humming to himself in the excess of his delight.

"Ted wishes somebody would sing a song," he said.

His mother glanced at Mabel. Poor Mabel's face grew very red again. It would be worse than telling a story.

"If we all sang together," she said timidly, "I wouldn't mind trying to begin."

So in a minute or two her clear young voice sang out — like a lark's it seemed to mount higher and still higher, gathering strength and courage as it

grew, and then softly dropping again as if to fetch the others, who joined her in the old familiar chorus of the simple song she had chosen — "Home, sweet home."

Ted listened entranced, and his little voice here and there could be distinguished. But suddenly, as Mabel stopped and a momentary silence fell on them all, he turned to his mother, and throwing himself into her arms, burst into tears.

"Muzzer," he said, "I can't bear it. It's *too* pitty," and though his mother and Mabel soothed the excited little fellow with gentle words and caresses, there were tears in more eyes than Ted's as they all thanked Mabel for her singing.

It was the next day that they had the rest of the story. The children were all in the garden together, not far from Ted's favourite "bridge." They could hear the babble of the little brook as it chattered past in the sunshine, and now and then the distant cry of a sea-bird would sound through the clear air, making Cheviott prick up his ears and look very wide-awake all of a sudden, though in reality, being no longer in the first bloom of youth, he was apt to get rather drowsy on a hot afternoon.

"We'se all ready, Mabel," said Ted, settling himself down comfortably in his favourite rest at her side. "Now go on p'ease. I can see the top of the mountain kite nice from here, and zen I can sink I'll see the old diant poking his head out," evidently the

child's fear of the mountain was fast becoming a thing of the past, and Percy felt quite pleased.

"Well," began Mabel, "I was telling you that Sunny had lived with her old grandfather and grandmother since she was quite little. They were very kind to her, but they were very poor, almost the poorest of all in the forest. And yet their cottage never seemed quite so dull and sad as the others. How could it, when there was always Sunny's bright head flitting about, and her merry voice sounding like a bird's?

"The old people looked at her half with pleasure and half sadly.

"'It can't last,' the old man said one day, when the little girl was running and jumping about in her usual happy way.

"The old woman knew what he meant without his explaining, and she nodded her head sadly, and just then Sunny came flying into the cottage to show them some flowers she had actually found in the forest, which, you see, was the greatest wonder possible, for there were almost *never* any flowers to be seen. And Sunny told them how she had found them in a little corner where the trees did not grow quite so thick, so that more light could get in. And when she saw how surprised the old people were, she looked at them rather strangely, and some new thoughts seemed to be awaking in her mind, and she said, 'Grandfather, why aren't there more

flowers in the forest, and why am I the only little girl that laughs and sings? Why does everybody look sad here? I can remember a little, just a little, about the other country I lived in before I came here. People used to laugh and smile there, and my mother had bright hair like mine, and father too was not sad till after mother had gone away and we came to this dark land. Why is it so dark, and why do you all look so sad?'

"The old man told her it was all for want of the sun, 'the blessed sun,' he called it, and Sunny thought about his words a great deal. And bit by bit she got the whole story from him, for he was one of the few remaining old people who knew the reason of their misfortunes. And Sunny thought and thought it over so much that she began to leave off dancing and laughing and singing as she used, so that her poor grandfather and grandmother began to be afraid that the sadness of the forest was at last spoiling her happy nature, and for a while they were very sorry about her. But one day she told them what she had in her mind. This was what she said to them—

"'Dear grandfather and grandmother, I cannot bear to see the sadness of the poor people here, and I have been thinking if nothing can be done. And a few nights ago I had a strange dream. I dreamt that a beautiful lady stood beside me and said, "Go, Sunny, and have no fear. The giant will not harm you." And since then it has come into my mind that I

might win back the sunshine for our poor neighbours, and for you too, dear grandfather and grandmother, for you are not so very old yet, if you will let me go to see if I can melt the giant's hard heart.'

"Sunny was standing in front of the old couple, and as she spoke, to their amazement, a sudden ray of sunshine crept in through the little rough window of the cottage and fell softly on her bright head. Her grandfather looked at her grandmother, and her grandmother looked at her grandfather. They didn't know how to speak — they were so surprised. Never, since they were quite, quite little children had they seen such a thing. And they whispered to each other that it must be a magic sign, they must let the child go. I think it was very good and kind of them to let her go, the only thing they had to cheer them. The tears rolled down their poor old faces as they said good-bye to her, not knowing if they would live to see her return. But they said to each other, 'We have not very many years to live. It would be very wrong of us to lose the chance of life and happiness for all the poor forest people just to keep *our* bit of sunshine to ourselves.' And so they let her go, for they were good old people."

"Ses," said Ted, "zem was very kind. But how dedful for Sunny to have to go to the diant. Did her go all alone, Mabel?"

"Yes, all alone. But she wasn't frightened. And somehow her grandfather and grandmother weren't

frightened for her either. They had a feeling that she *had* to go, and so she did. She set off the very next morning. Her grandfather explained the way to her, for old as he was he had never forgotten the days when the passage through the giant's mountain was left free and open, so that there was no need for the forest people to spend all their lives in the gloom and shade.

"Sunny walked quietly along the dark paths among the trees. She didn't dance and skip as usual, for she felt as if all of a sudden she had grown almost into a woman, with the thought of what she had to do for her poor neighbours. And as she looked about her, she felt as if she had never before quite noticed how dark and chill and gloomy it was. She had a good way to walk, for since the closing of the passage the people had moved farther and farther into the forest. They had grown afraid of the giant, and were glad to get as far from him as they could, for there was no good to be got by staying near him. So Sunny walked on, past the cottages she knew, where she nodded to the people she saw, but without speaking to them, which was so unlike her usual merry way that they all looked after her in surprise and wondered what had come over the little girl. And one or two of them shook their heads and said sadly that she was getting to be like the rest of them. But Sunny walked on, farther and farther, now and then smiling quietly to

herself, and her bright little head shining in the darkness almost as if the sun was lighting it up. She went a good way, but there was nothing new or different. It was always the dark forest and the gloomy trees. But at last she saw, close to her, behind the trees, the dark sides of the great mountain, and she knew that she must be near the closed-up door."

"Oh!" said Ted, "wasn't her afraid of bears?"

"No," said Mabel, "she wasn't afraid of anything. She went quietly up to the door and stood before it. It was barred and barred with iron, and it was so long since it had been opened that the ivy and those sorts of plants had grown all over it, creeping round the iron bars. It looked as if it hadn't been opened for a hundred years, and I dare say it hadn't been. But Sunny knew what to do. She hunted about among the leaves and branches till she found a little silver knob — her grandfather had told her about it; and the queer thing was that though the iron bars were quite rusted over so that you wouldn't have known what they were, the little silver knob was still bright and shining as if it had been cleaned every day always."

"Wif plate-powder," said Ted, who was very learned about such matters, as he was very fond of watching the servants at their work.

"Yes," said Mabel, "just as if it had been cleaned with plate-powder. Well, Sunny pressed this little

"She hunted about among the Leaves and Branches till she found a Little Silver Knob." — p. 76.

knob, and a minute or two after she heard a clear tinkling bell. That was just what her grandfather had told her she would hear, so she stood quite still and waited. In a little while she seemed to hear a sound as of something coming along the passage, and suddenly the top part of the door — at least it was more like a window cut in the door — opened, and a voice, though she could not see anybody, called out, 'Have you come to stay?' This too was what her grandfather had told her she would hear, so she knew what to say, and she answered 'Yes.' Then the voice said again, 'At what price?' and Sunny answered, 'Sunshine for the forest.' But her heart began to beat faster when the door slowly opened and she saw that she must enter the dark passage. There was no one to be seen, even though the voice had sounded quite near, so Sunny just walked on, looking about her, for gradually as she went farther, either her eyes grew used to the darkness, or a slight light began to come, and in a few minutes she saw before her a very, very high staircase. It went straight up, without turnings or landings, and the steps were quite white, so she saw them plainly though the light was dim, and as there was nowhere else to go, she just went straight on. I can't tell you what a long time she seemed to keep going upstairs, but at last the steps stopped, and before her she saw another door. It wasn't a door like the one down below, it was more like a gate, for it was a

sort of a grating that you could see through. Sunny pressed her face against it and peeped in. She saw a large dark room, with a rounded roof something like a church, and in one corner a very old, grim-looking man was sitting. He had a very long beard, but he didn't look so awfully big as Sunny had expected, for she knew he must be the giant. He was sitting quite still, and it seemed to Sunny that he was shivering. Anyway he looked very old and very lonely and sad, and instead of feeling frightened of him the little girl felt very sorry for him. She stood there quite still, but though she didn't make the least noise he found out she was there. He waved his hand, and the barred door opened and Sunny walked in. She walked right up to the giant and made him a curtsey. Rather to her surprise he made her a bow, then he waved his hands about and moved his lips as if he were speaking, but no sound came, and Sunny stared at him in surprise. She began to wonder if he was deaf and dumb, and if so how could she explain to him what she had come for?

"'I can't understand what you are saying, sir,' she said very politely, and then, to her still greater surprise, the waving of his hands and the moving of his lips seemed to succeed, for in a very queer deep voice he answered her.

"'What do you want?' he said. 'I sent my voice downstairs to speak to you, and he has been loitering on the way, lazy fellow, all this time. There are no

good servants to be had now-a-days, none. I've not had one worth his salt since I sent my old ones back to Ogreland when they got past work. What do you want?'

"'Sunshine for the forest people.'

"That was all Sunny said, and she looked at the grim old giant straight in the face. He looked at her, and went on shivering and rubbing his hands. Then he said, with a frown,

"'Why should they have sunshine? I can't get it myself, since I'm too old to get up to the top there. Sunshine indeed!' and then he suddenly stretched out his hand to her and made a grab at her hair, screaming out, 'Why, you've got sunshine! Come here, and let me warm my hands. Ugh! that's the first time I've felt a little less chilly these hundred years,' and Sunny stood patiently beside him and let him stroke her golden hair up and down, and in a minute or two she said quietly,

"'Will you unfasten the door, good Mr. Giant, and let the poor people through to the other side?'

"The giant still kept hold of her hair. 'It would be no good cutting it off — the sunshine would go out of it,' Sunny heard him saying to himself. So she just said again quietly, 'Will you unfasten the door, good Mr. Giant?'

"And at last he said, 'I'll consider about it. Your hair's getting cold. Go upstairs,' and he nodded his head towards a door in the corner of the

room, 'go upstairs and fetch some sunshine for me, and come down again.'

"But Sunny wouldn't stir till she had got something out of him. And she said for the third time,

"'Will you unfasten the door, good Mr. Giant, if I go upstairs to please you?'

"And the giant gave her a push, and said to her, 'Get off with you, you tiresome child. Yes, I'll open the door if you'll go and bathe your hair well, and then come down to warm my hands.'

"So Sunny went upstairs. This stair wasn't like the other. It was a turny, screwy stair that went round and round itself, for you see it was near the top of the mountain and there wasn't so much room as down below. Sunny felt rather giddy when she got to the top, but she got all right again in a minute when she pushed open the little door she found there and came out into the sunlight. It was *so* lovely, and remember, she hadn't seen sunshine, even though some of the brightness had stayed with her, since she was a very little girl. You have no idea how pretty it was up there, not gloomy at all, and with the beautiful warm sunshine pouring down all round. Sunny was very pleased to warm herself in it, and then when she looked down over the side of the mountain and saw the dark tops of the forest trees, she was still more pleased to think that soon her poor friends would have a chance of enjoying it too. And when she thought that her hair had

caught enough sunshine to please the giant she called down through the screwy staircase, 'Have you opened the door, Mr. Giant?' And when the giant said, 'Come down and I'll tell you,' she answered, 'No, Mr. Giant, I can't come till you've opened the door.' And then she heard him grumbling to himself, and in a minute she heard a rattling noise, and she knew the door was opened, and then she came down. She had settled with her grandfather that if she didn't come straight back, he would send some of the people to watch for the door being opened, so she knew it would be all right, for once the giant had agreed to open it, he couldn't shut it again — that was settled somehow, some magic way I suppose, the story didn't say how. So then Sunny came downstairs again, and the giant stroked her hair up and down till his poor old hands were quite warm, and he grew quite pleased and good-natured. But he wouldn't let Sunny go away, and she had to stay, you see, because the top-door, the one like a gate, was still shut up. And anyway she didn't want to be unkind to the giant. She promised him that she would come back to see him every day if he liked if only he would let her go, but he wouldn't, so she had to stay. I don't know how long she stayed. It was a long time, for the story said she grew thin and white with being shut up in the giant's cave and having no running about. It was worse than the forest. The only thing that kept her alive was

the sunshine she got every morning, for there was *always* sunshine at the top of the mountain, and then, too, the comfort of knowing that the poor people were enjoying it too, for when she was up on the top she could hear their voices down below, as they came to the door. Day by day she heard their voices grow merrier and brighter, and after a while she could even hear the little children laughing and shouting with glee. And Sunny felt that she didn't mind for herself, she was *so* glad to think that she had done some good to her poor friends. But she got paler and thinner and weaker — it was so very tiring to stand such a long time every day while the giant stroked the sunshine out of her golden hair to warm his withered old hands, and it was so terribly dark and dull and cold in the gloomy cavern. She would hardly have known how the days went or when was day and when was night, but for the giant sending her upstairs every morning. But one morning came when she could not go; she got up a few steps, and then her strength went away and she seemed to get half asleep, and she said to herself that she was going to die, and she did not know anything more. She seemed to be dreaming. She fancied the giant came to look for her, and that his old face grew sad and sorry when he saw her. And then she thought she heard him say, 'Poor little girl, I did not mean to hurt her. I have done harm enough. Sunny, forgive me. The giant will do

you and your people no more harm. His day is over.' Then she really did sleep, for a long time I fancy, for when she woke up she could not think where she was. She thought at first she was on the top of the mountain, it seemed so beautifully bright and warm. She sat up a little and looked about her, and she *couldn't* think where she was, for on one side close to her, she saw the dark trees of the forest that she knew so well, and on the other, smiling green fields and orchards and cottages with gardens filled with flowers, just the sort of country her grandfather had told her he remembered when he was a child on the other side of the great hill. It was just as if the mountain had melted away. And, just fancy, that *was* what had happened! For in a little while Sunny heard voices coming near her, all talking eagerly. It was the people of the forest who had found out what had come to pass, and they were all hurrying to look for Sunny, for they were terribly afraid that the giant had taken her away to Ogreland with the mountain. But he hadn't, you see! And Sunny and all the forest people lived all their lives as happy as could be — they were happier even than in the old days the grandfather and grandmother remembered, for not only were they free to leave the dark forest and enjoy the sunlight as often as they liked, but the sunshine now found its way by all the chinks and crannies among the branches into the very forest itself."

"And did they never hear anything more of the giant?" asked Percy.

"No," said Mabel, "only in hot summer days sometimes, when the sun was beating down too much on the fields and gardens, the people of that country used to notice a large soft gray cloud that often came between them and the sunshine, and would stay there till the great heat grew less. This cloud seemed always the same shape, and somehow, Sunny, remembering her vision of the giant, thought to herself that the cloud was perhaps he, and that he wanted to make up for his long cruelty. And the children of the forest having heard her story used to laugh when they saw the cloud, and say to each other, 'See, there is the giant warming his hands.' But Sunny would say softly in a whisper, 'Thank you, Mr. Giant.'

"And though it is a very, very long time since all that happened, it has never been quite forgotten, and the people of that country are noted for their healthy happy faces, and the little children for their rosy cheeks and golden hair."

Mabel stopped.

"It is a very pretty story," said Percy. "Are there more like it in the book where you read it?"

Mabel was just going to answer, when her attention was caught by Ted.

"I do believe he's asleep," she said softly, for Ted had curled himself up like a dormouse in his little

nest at her side. But just then the two-legged dormouse gave a funny chuckle, which showed that whether he *had* been asleep or not, he certainly was so no longer.

"What are you laughing at, Teddy?" said Percy.

"I were just sinking," said Ted, "what a silly boy Ted were to be afraid of mountains — Ted would like to go up to the very, very top," he went on valorously. "Ted wouldn't mind a bit — not," with a prudent reservation, "not if thoo and Mabel was wif me."

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE NARCISSA.

"But, I think, of all new-comers,
Little children are the best."

FROM this time, I think, Ted lost his fear of mountains and giants. It was not till a long time afterwards that he explained to his mother exactly how it had been, and by that time he was of course quite big enough to understand that Mr. Brand had only been joking. But still he did not much care about seeing that gentleman again. He generally managed to be out of the way when he saw the dog-cart with the gray horse driving in at the gate, and just once, when he would not have had time to run off without actual rudeness, which little Ted *never* was guilty of, he only waited to shake hands and say "Quite well, thank thoo," before he disappeared in so unaccountable a manner that he could not be found as long as Mr. Brand's visit lasted.

It was a good deal thanks to Mabel's story that he grew to like his old friend the mountain again. But partly too, I dare say, he forgot his fears on account of several very interesting things that happened about this time. It was a great sorrow to him when Percy had to go back to school — that was

one of little Ted's lasting or rather returning sorrows, all through his childhood. Only, like many things in our lives, if we learn to look at them in the right way, it was certainly a trouble with a bright side to it, a cloud with a silver lining — a silver lining which shone indeed all the brighter for the gray outside — for was there not the delight, the *delicious* delight, of the coming back again, the showing all the changes in the garden since Percy was last there, the new toys and other little presents that Ted had received, and listening to Percy's thrilling accounts of school-life, the relating his own adventures?

Still there were times, especially now that Ted was really growing very sensible, that he wished for some other companion in his simple daily life, some one who, like the little fishes, did not have to go to school. And now and then, when, in his rare expeditions to the sea-side town not far off, he saw little groups of brothers and sisters trotting along together, or when in the stories his mother read to him he heard of happy nursery parties, Ted used to wish *he* had a little "bruvver or sister, even a baby one would be very nice." For deep down in his loving heart there was already the true manly spirit, the longing to have something to take care of and protect; something tinier and more tender even than wee Ted himself.

And to make his child-life complete this pretty

thing came to him. With the autumn days, just when Ted was beginning to feel a little sad at the summer brightness going away, and his garden work had come to be chiefly helping old David to sweep up the fast-falling leaves, there came to Ted a dear little baby sister. She was the dearest little thing — bright-eyed and merry, and looking as if she was ready for all sorts of fun. She was stronger than Ted had been, and to tell the truth I think I must say prettier. For sweet and fair and dear as was Ted's face both in baby- and boy-hood, he was not what one would call pretty. Not the sort of child whose proud nurse comes home with wonderful stories of ladies stopping her in the street to ask whose beautiful baby he was — not a splendidly vigorous, stalwart little man like a small eight-years-old of my acquaintance whose mother was lately afraid to walk about the streets of Berlin with him lest the old Emperor, as he sometimes does, should want to have him to make an officer of! No; Ted, though lithe and active as a squirrel, merry as a cricket, was not a "showy" child. He was just our own dear little Ted, our happy-hearted Christmas child.

But I suppose there never was in this world any one so happy but that it was *possible* for him to be happier. And this "more happiness" came to Ted in the shape of his baby sister, Narcissa. Boys who despise sisters, "girls" in any shape, big or little, don't know what a great deal they lose. Ted was

BABY SHOWED, OR TED *thought* SHE DID, A QUITE EXTRAORDINARY LOVE FOR THE BOUQUETS HER LITTLE BROTHER ARRANGED FOR HER. — p. 89.

still a good way off the "big boy" stage, and indeed I don't think anything could have made it possible for him to look at things as too many big boys do. By the time he reached schoolboy-hood, Narcissa was a dainty maiden of five or six, and quite able to stand up for herself in a little queenly way, even had her brother been less tender and devoted. And of the years between, though I would like to tell you something, I cannot tell you half nor a quarter. They were happy sunny years, though not *quite* without clouds of course. And the first summer of little Cissy's life was a sort of bright opening to them.

It was again a very beautiful summer. The children almost lived out-of-doors. Poor nurse found it difficult to get the work in the house that fell to her share finished in the morning before Ted was tugging at her to "tum out into the garden, baby does *so* want to tum;" and baby soon learnt to clap her hands and chuckle with glee when her little hat was tied on and she was carried downstairs to her perambulator waiting at the door. And there was new interest for Ted in hunting for the loveliest wild flowers he could find, as baby showed, or Ted *thought* she did, a quite extraordinary love for the bouquets her little brother arranged for her.

"Her knows *kite* well which is the prettiest ones, doesn't her, nurse?" he said one day when they were all three — all four rather, for of course Chevie was one of the group — established in their favourite

place under the shade of a great tree, whose waving branches little Cissy loved so much that she would cry when nurse wheeled her away from it. "I think baby knows *lots*, though she can't speak;" and baby, pleased at his evidently talking of *her*, burst into a funny crowing laugh, which seemed exactly as if she knew and approved of what he was saying.

"Baby's a darling," said nurse.

"How soon will her learn to speak?" Ted inquired gravely.

"Not just yet. She hasn't got any teeth. Nobody can speak without teeth," said nurse.

"I hope," said Ted, more gravely still, "I hope Dod hasn't forgotten them."

Nurse turned away to hide a smile.

"No fear, Master Ted," she said in a minute. "She'll have nice little teeth bye-and-bye, you'll see. They'll be wee tiny white specks at first, and then they'll grow quite big and strong enough to bite with. That's how your teeth came. Not all of a sudden, you see."

"Ses," said Ted. "Nothing comes all in one sudden. The f'owers is weeny, weeny buds at first, and then they gets big. Nurse, I'm going to take my cart to get a *lot* of daisies down by the brook for baby. She likes to roll zem in her hands," and off he set with his little blue cart and white horse, his best beloved possession, and which had done good service in its time, to fill it with flowers for Cissy.

A few minutes later, as he was manfully dragging the cart up the path again, gee-upping and gee-whoing at the horse, which was supposed to find the daisy heads a heavy load uphill, his mother came out to the garden.

"Ted, dear," she said, "your father is going to drive me to A——. It is a long time since you were there, and I should like to have my little boy to go about with me while your papa is busy. I have a good deal of shopping to do. Would you like to go with me?"

Ted gave a shout of pleasure. Then suddenly his glance fell on the little sister still in her perambulator under the big tree, and his eyes filled with tears.

"I would like dedfully to go," he said, "but poor Cissy. I is *so* afraid Cissy will cry if I go."

He lifted his wistful little face to his mother's with an expression that went to her heart.

"Dear Ted," she said; "you are a good, kind, little boy. But don't make yourself unhappy about Cissy. She is too little to cry for your going away, though she will laugh to see you come back."

Ted's face cleared, but suddenly a rosy colour spread over it.

"Muzzer," he said, in a low voice, tugging gently at her dress to make her stoop down, "muzzer, I *sink* I were going to cry not all for poor baby being sorry, but part 'cos I did so want to go."

Mother understood his simple confession.

"Yes, dear," she said, "I dare say you did, and it is right of you to tell me. My good little Ted," she could not resist adding again, and again little Ted's face grew red, but this time with pleasure at mother's praise.

Baby bore the announcement, which he considered it his duty to make to her with great formality, very philosophically. Less philosophically did she take nurse's wheeling her away from under her beloved tree with its fluttering branches, towards the house, where nurse had to go to prepare Ted for his expedition. In fact, I am sorry to say that so little did the young lady realise what was expected of her, that she burst into a loud roar, which was quite too much for Ted's feelings.

"Dear baby, sweet baby," he cried, "thoo mustn't be tooked away from thoo's tree. I'll ask muzzer to deck me, nurse," he went on eagerly, for his mother had returned to the house, "or I can nearly kite well deck myself. I'll call thoo if I can't find my things. I'll run and ask muzzer," and off he went, so eager to give no trouble, so ready and helpful that nurse thought it best to let him have his way, and to devote her attention to the discomposed Miss Baby.

Ted did not find his mother quite so quickly as he expected, though he peeped into the drawing-room and called her by name as he passed her own room upstairs, on his way to the nursery. The fact was

that mother was in the kitchen consulting with cook as to the groceries required to be ordered, and it never came into Ted's head to look for her there at this time of day. So he went straight on to the nursery, and managing with a good deal of tugging and pulling and coaxing to open *his* drawer in the chest, he got out his best little coat and hat and prepared to don them. But first he looked at his hands, which were none the whiter for their recent ravages among the daisies.

"Zem's very dirty," he said to himself; "zem must be washed."

There was water in the jug, but Ted's ambition was aroused, and great things were to be expected of a little boy who was big enough to "deck himself," as he would have described the process.

"Ses, zem's *very* dirty," he repeated, contemplating the two sunburnt little paws in question. "Zem should have hot water. Hot water makes zem ze most clean."

He glanced round, the hot water was not far to seek, for, though it was June, the weather was not very warm, and nurse generally kept a small fire burning in the day-nursery. And beside the fire, temptingly beside the fire, stood the kettle, into which Ted peeping, satisfied himself that there was water enough for his purpose. He would hardly have had patience to fetch it had it not been there, so eager was he for the delights of putting it on to

boil. And, wonderful to say, he managed it; he got the kettle, heavy for him to lift, as you can imagine, safely on to the fire, and then, with immense satisfaction, sat down in front of it to watch the result. There was very little water in the kettle, but, though Ted did not think about that, it was all the less trying for his patience. And I hardly think either, that the water could have been quite cold in the first place, or else the fairies came down the chimney and blew up the fire with their invisible bellows to help little Ted, for certainly the kettle began to boil amazingly soon — first it simmered gently and then it began to sing more loudly, and at last what Ted called "moke" began to come out of the spout, and he knew that the kettle was boiling.

Ted was so used to hear nurse talking about the kettle "boiling" for tea, that it never came into his head that it was not necessary to have "boiling" water to wash his poor little hands. I don't indeed know what might not have happened to the whole of his poor little body had not his mother at that moment come into the room. A queer sight met her eyes — there was Ted, more than half undressed, barefooted and red-faced, in the act of lifting off the steaming kettle, round the handle of which, with wonderful precaution, he had wrapped his pocket-handkerchief.

Ted's mother kept her presence of mind. She did not speak till the kettle was safely landed on the

floor, and Ted, with a sigh of relief, looked up and saw her at the door.

"I is decking myself, muzzer," he said with a pleased smile, and a charming air of importance. "Poor baby cried, so I told nurse I would deck myself, and nurse didn't mind."

"*Didn't* she?" said his mother, rather surprised.

"Oh, she thoughtened p'raps I'd find thoo, I amember," Ted continued, correcting himself.

"But did nurse know you were going to boil water?" said his mother.

"Oh no," said Ted, "it were only that my hands is *so* dirty. Zem needs hot water to make zem clean."

"Hot water, but not *boiling*," said his mother; "my dear little boy, do you know you might have scalded yourself dreadfully?"

"I put my hankerwick not to burn my hands," said Ted, rather disconsolately.

"Yes, dear. I know you meant it for the best, but just think if you had dropped the kettle and burnt yourself. And nurse has always told you not to play with fire or hot water."

"Ses," said Ted, "but I weren't *playing*. I were going to wash my hands to be nice to go out wif thoo," and his blue eyes filled with tears. But they were soon wiped away, and when his mother had with the help of *some* of the hot water made face and hands as clean as could be, and smoothed the tangled

curls and fastened the best little coat, Ted looked very "nice" indeed, I can assure you, for his drive to A——.

It was a very happy drive. Perched safely between his father and mother, Ted was as proud as a king. It was all so pretty, the driving through the shady lanes, where the honeysuckle and wild-roses were just beginning to show some tints of colour, the peeps now and then of the sea below in its blue beauty, the glancing up sometimes at the mountain top, Ted's old friend, along whose sides they were actually travelling — it was all delightful. And when they drew near the little town, and the houses began to stand closer, till at last they came in rows and streets, and the old mare's hoofs clattered over the stones of the market-place so that the people in the sleepy little place came out to see who was coming, Ted's excitement knew no bounds. He had almost forgotten A——, it was so long since he had been there — the sights of the shops and what appeared to him their wonderful contents, the sight even of so many people and children walking about, was almost too much for the little country child; it seemed to take his breath away.

He recovered his composure, however, when he found himself trotting about the streets with his mother. She had several shops to go to, each, to Ted, more interesting than the other. There was the ironmonger's to visit, for cook had begged for a

new preserving pan and the nursery tea-pot handle was broken; there were various milk jugs and plates to replace at the china shop; brown holland to get at the draper's for Ted's summer blouses. At two or three of the shops his mother, being a regular customer and having an account with them, did not pay, and among these was the grocer's, where she had rather a long list of things needed for the store-closet, and while she was explaining about them all to the white-aproned young man behind the counter, Ted marched about the shop on a voyage of discovery on his own account. There were so many interesting things — barrels of sugar, white, brown, and darker brown still, neat piles of raisins and currants, closely fastened bottles of French plums, and rows of paper-covered tin boxes which Ted knew contained biscuits.

"What a kind man," he said to himself, "to give muzzer all she wants," as one after another of his mother's requests was attended to. "Why, he lets muzzer take whatever her likes!" he added, as having brought his wanderings to a close for a minute, he stood beside her and saw her lifting a little square of honey soap out of a box which the grocer presented to her for examination, and, greatly impressed, Ted set off again on another ramble. Doubtless he too might take whatever he liked, and as the thought occurred to him he pulled up before another barrel filled with lumps, little and big, of half clear,

whitey-looking stuff, something like very coarse lump sugar, only not so white, and more transparent. Ted knew what it was. It was soda, *washing* soda I believe it is usually called. Ted was, as I have said, very wide-awake about all household matters, for he always used his eyes, and very often — indeed rather oftener than was sometimes pleasant for the people about him if they wanted to be quiet — his tongue too, for he was great at asking questions.

"Soda's very useful," Ted reflected; "nurse says it makes things come cleaner."

Just then his mother called him.

"Ted, dear," she said, "I'm going."

Ted started and ran after her, but just as he did so, he stretched out his hand and took a lump of soda out of the barrel. He did it quite openly, he didn't mind in the very least if the shopman saw him — like the daisies in the field, so he thought, the soda and the sugar and the French plums and everything were there for him or for any one to help themselves to as they liked. But Ted was not greedy — he was far better pleased to get something "useful" for mother than anything for himself. He would have asked her what he had better take, if he had had time — he would have stopped to say "Thank you" to the grocer had he not been in such a hurry to run after his mother.

They walked quickly down the street. Ted's mother was a little absent-minded for the moment —

she was thinking of what she had ordered, and hoping she had forgotten nothing. And holding her little boy by the one hand she did not notice the queer thing he was holding in the other. Suddenly she stopped before a boot and shoe shop.

"I must get baby a pair of shoes," she said. "She is such a little kicker, she has the toes of her cloth ones out in no time. We must get her a pair of leather ones I think, Ted."

"Ses, I sink so," said Ted.

So his mother went into the shop and asked the man to show her some little leather shoes. Ted looked on with great interest, but when the shoes were spread out on the counter and he saw that they were all *black*, he seemed rather disappointed.

"Muzzer," he said in a low voice, tugging at his mother's skirts, "I saw such bootly boo boots in the man's winder."

His mother smiled.

"Yes, dear," she replied, "they're very pretty, but they wouldn't last so long, and I suspect they cost much more."

Ted looked puzzled.

"What does thoo mean?" he said, but before his mother had time to explain, the active shopman had reached down the "bootly" boots and held them forward temptingly.

"They're certainly very pretty," said baby's mother, who, to tell the truth, was nearly as much inclined

for the blue boots as Ted himself. "What is the price of them?"

"Three and sixpence, ma'am," replied the man.

"And the black ones, the little black shoes, I mean?"

"Two and six," replied the man.

"A shilling difference, you see, Ted," said his mother. But Ted only looked puzzled, and his mother, occupied with the boots, did not particularly notice him.

"I think," she said at last, "I think I will take both. But as the blue boots will be best ones for a good while, give me them half a size larger than the little black shoes."

The shopman proceeded to wrap them up in paper and handed them to Ted's mother, who took out her purse and paid the money. The man thanked her, and, followed by her little boy, Ted's mother left the shop.

Ted walked on silently, a very unusual state of things. He was trying to find out how to express what he wanted to ask, and the ideas in his head were so new and strange that he could not fit them with words all at once. His mother turned round to him.

"Would you like to carry the parcel of baby's shoes for her?" she said.

"Oh ses," said Ted, holding out his left hand. But as his mother was giving him the parcel she noticed that his right hand was already engaged.

"Why, what have you got there?" she asked, "a stone? Where did you get it? No, it's not a stone — why, can it be a lump of soda?"

"Ses," returned Ted with the greatest composure, "it are a lump of soda. I thought it would be very suseful for thoo, so I took it out of that nice man's shop."

"My dear little boy!" exclaimed his mother, looking I don't know how. She was rather startled, but she could not help being amused too, only she thought it better not to show Ted that she was amused. "My dear little boy," she said again, "do you not understand? The things in the shop belong to the man — they are his, not ours."

"Ses," said Ted. "I know. But he lets thoo take them. Thoo took soap and somesing else, and he said he'd send them home for thoo."

"Yes, dear, so he did," said his mother. "But I *pay* him for them. You didn't see me paying him, because I don't pay him every time. He puts down all I get in a book, and then he counts up how much it is every month, and then I send him the money. In some shops I pay as soon as I get the things. You saw me pay the shoemaker for little Cissy's boots and shoes."

"Ses," said Ted, "I saw thoo take money out of thoo's purse, but I didn't understand. I thought all those kind men kept nice things for us to get whenever we wanted."

"But what did you think money was for, little Ted? You have often seen money, shillings and sixpences and pennies? What did you think was the use of it?"

"I thought," said Ted innocently, "I thought moneys was for giving to poor peoples."

His mother could hardly resist stooping down in the street to kiss him. But she knew it was better not. Ted must be made to understand that in his innocence he had done a wrong thing, and the lesson of to-day must be made a plain and lasting one.

"What would poor people do with money if they could get all the things they wanted out of the shops for nothing?" she said quietly.

Ted considered a moment. Then he looked up brightly.

"In course!" he said. "I never thought of that."

"And don't you see, dear Ted, that it would be wrong to take things out of a shop without paying for them? They *belong* to the man of the shop — it would be just like some one coming to our house and taking away your father's coat or my bonnet, or your little blue cart that you like so much, or — "

"Or Cissy's bootly boo boots," suggested Ted, clutching hold more tightly of the parcel, as if he thought the imaginary thief might be at hand.

"Yes," said his mother, "or Cissy's new boots, which are mine *now* because I paid money for them to the man."

"Ses," said Ted. Then a very thoughtful expression came into his face. "Muzzer," he said, "this soda was that man's — sall I take it back to him and tell him I didn't understand?"

"Yes," said his mother. "I do think it is the best thing to do. Shall we go at once? It is only just round the corner to his shop."

She said this thinking that little Ted would find it easier to do it at once, for she was sorry for her little boy having to explain to a stranger the queer mistake he had made, though she felt it was right that it should be done. "Shall we go at once?" she repeated, looking rather anxiously at the small figure beside her.

"Ses," said Ted, and rather to her surprise his tone was quite bright and cheery. So they turned back and walked down the street till they came to the corner near which was the grocer's shop.

Ted's mother had taken the parcel of the little boots from him and held him by the hand, to give him courage as it were. But he marched on quite steadily without the least flinching or dragging back, and when they reached the shop it was he who went in first. He walked straight up to the counter and held out the lump of soda to the shopman.

"Please, man," he said, "I didn't know I should pay money for this. I didn't understand till muzzer told me, and so I've brought it back."

The grocer looked at him in surprise, but with a

smile on his face, for he was a kind man, with little boys and girls of his own. But before he said anything, Ted's mother came forward to explain that it was almost the first time her little boy had been in a shop; he had not before understood what buying and selling meant, but now that she had explained it to him, she thought it right for him himself to bring back the lump of soda.

"And indeed it was his own wish to do so," she added.

The grocer thanked her. It was not of the least consequence to him of course he said, but still he was a sensible man and he respected Ted's mother for what she had done. And then, half afraid that her little boy's self-control would not last much longer, she took him by the hand, and bidding the shopman good-day they left the shop. As they came out into the street again she looked down at Ted. To her surprise his little face was quite bright and happy.

"He were a kind man," said Ted; "he wasn't vexed with Ted. He knew I didn't understand."

"Yes, dear," said his mother, pleased to see the simple straightforward way in which Ted had taken the lesson; "but *now*, Ted, you do understand, and you would never again touch anything in a shop, would you?"

"Oh no, muzzer, in course not," said Ted, his face flushing a little. "Ted would *never* take nothing

that wasn't his — *never;* thoo knows that, muzzer?" he added anxiously.

"Yes, my dear little boy," and this time his mother *did* stoop down and kiss him in the street.

CHAPTER VII.

GETTING BIG.

"The children think they'll climb a tree."

It was a very happy little Ted that trotted upstairs to the nursery with the "bootly boo boots" and the more modest little black shoes for tiny Narcissa.

"See what Ted has brought thoo," he said, kissing his baby sister with the pretty tenderness he always showed her, "and see what muzzer has gave *me*," he went on, turning to nurse with another parcel. In his excitement he didn't know which to unfasten first, and baby had got hold of one of the black shoes, fortunately not the blue ones, and was sucking it vigorously before Ted and nurse saw what she was doing.

"*Isn't* she pleased?" said Ted, delightedly. Baby must be very pleased with her new possessions, to try to *eat* them, he thought. And then he had time to examine and admire his own present. It was a delightful one — a book, a nice old-fashioned fat book of all the old nursery rhymes, and filled with pictures too. And Ted's pride was great when here and there he could make out a word or two. Thanks to the

pictures, to his own good memory, and the patience of all the big people about him, it was not long before he could say nearly all of them. And so a new pleasure was added to these happy summer days, and to many a winter evening to come.

That night when Ted was going to bed he said his prayers as usual at his mother's knee.

"Make me a good little boy," he said, and then when he had ended he jumped up for his good-night kiss, with a beaming face.

"I sink God *has* made me good, muzzer," he said.

"Do you, dear? I hope he is *making* you so," she answered. "But what makes you say so?"

"'Cos I *feel* so happy and so good," said Ted, "and thoo said I was good to-day when thoo kissed me. And oh, *may* I take my sprendid hymn-book to bed wif me?"

And with the ancient legends of Jack and Jill and Little Boy Blue, and Margery Daw, safely under his pillow, happy Ted fell asleep. I wonder if he dreamt of them! What a pity that so much of the pretty fancies and visions of little childhood are lost to us! What quaint pictures they would make. What a heavy burden *should* lie on the consciences of those who, by careless words or unconsidered tone, destroy the lovely tenderness of little childrens' dreams and conceits, rub off the bloom of baby poetry!

I could tell you, dear little friends, many pretty stories of Ted and his tiny sister during the first sunny year of little Narcissa's life, but I dare say it may be more interesting to you to hear more of these children as they grow older. The day-by-day life of simple happy little people is, I trust, familiar to you all, and as I want you to *know* my boy Ted, to think of him through your own childhood as a friend and companion, I must not take up too much of the little book, so quickly filled, with the first years only of his life. And these had now come to an end — a change, to Ted a great and wonderful change, happened about this time. Before little Cissy had learnt to run alone, before Ted had mastered the longest words in his precious "hymn-book," these little people had to leave their beautiful mountain home. One day when the world was looking pensive and sad in its autumn dress, the good-byes had to be said — good-bye to the garden and Ted's shaky bridge; good-bye to old David; and alas! good-bye to Cheviott's grave, all that was left of the faithful old collie to say good-bye to; good-bye to the far-off murmur of the sea and the silent mountain that little Ted had once been so afraid of; good-bye to all of the dear old home, where Ted's blue cart was left forgotten under a tree, where the birds went on singing and chirping as if there were no such things as good-byes in the world — and Ted and Cissy were driven away to a new home, and the oft-

told stories of their first one were all that was left of it to their childish minds.

A good many hours' journey from the mountains and the sea near which these children had spent their first happy years, in quite another corner of England, there is to be found a beautiful, quiet old town. It is beautiful from its position, for it stands on rising ground; a fine old river flows round the feet of its castle rock, and on the other side are to be seen high cliffs with pleasant winding paths, sometimes descending close to the water's edge, and it is beautiful in itself. For the castle is such a castle as is not to be met with many times in one's life. It has taken centuries of repose after the stormy scenes it lived through in the long-ago days to make it what it now is — a venerable old giant among its fellows, grim and solemn yet with a dreamy peacefulness about it, that has a wonderful charm. As you cross the unused drawbridge and your footsteps sink in the mossy grass of the great courtyard, it would not be difficult to fancy you were about to enter the castle of the sleeping-beauty of the dear old fairy-tale — so still and dream-like it seems, so strange it is to picture to one's fancy the now grass-grown keep with the din and clang of horsemen and men-at-arms that it must once have known. And near by is a grand old church, solemn and silent too, but differently so from its twin-brother the castle. The one is like a warrior resting after his battles, thinking sadly of the wild

scenes he has seen and taken part in; the other like a holy man of old, silent and solemn too, but with the weight of human sorrows and anxieties that have been confided to him, yet ever ready to sympathise and to point upwards with a hope that never fails.

These at least were the feelings that the sight of the old church and the old castle gave *me*, children dear. I don't suppose Ted thought of them in this way when he first made their acquaintance, and yet I don't know. He might not have been able to say much of what he felt, he was such a little fellow. But he *did* feel, and in a way that was strange and new, and nearly took his breath away the first time he entered the beautiful old church, walking quietly up the aisle behind his father, his little hat in his hand, gazing up with his earnest eyes at the mysterious stretch of the lofty roof. "O mother," he said, when he went home, "when I am big I will always like the *high* church best." And when the clear ringing chimes burst forth, as they did with ever-fresh beauty four times a day, sounding to the baby fancy as if they came straight down from heaven, it was all Ted could do not to burst into tears, as he had done that summer day when Mabel had sung "Home, sweet home" in the mountain-gorge.

For it was in this old town, with its church and castle and quaint streets, where some of the houses are still painted black and white, and others lean for-

ward in the top stories as if they wanted to kiss each other; where the front doors mostly open right on to the street, and you come upon the dear old gardens as a sort of delicious surprise at the back; where each turn as you walk about these same old streets gives you a new peep, more delightful than the last, of the river or the cliffs or the far distant hills with their tender lights and shadows; where, on market days the country people come trooping in with their poultry and butter and eggs, with here and there a scarlet cloak among them, the coming and going giving the old High Street the look almost of a foreign town; — here in this dear old place little Ted took root again, and learned to love his new home so much that he forgot to pine for the mountains and the sea. And, here, some years after we said good-bye to them as they drove away from the pretty house in the garden, we find them again — Ted, a big boy of nine or ten, Cissy looking perhaps older than she really was, so bright and hearty and capable a little maiden had she become.

They are in the garden, the dear garden that was as delightful a playing place as children could have, though quite, quite different from the first one you saw Ted in. There it was all ups and downs, lying as it did on the side of a hill; here the paths are on flat ground, though some are zigzaggy of course, as the little paths in an interesting garden always should be; while besides these, some fine broad ones

run straight from one end to another, making splendid highroads for drives in wheelbarrows or toy-carts. And in this garden too the trees are high and well grown, and plenty of them. It was just the place for hide-and-seek or "I spy."

Ted and Cissy have been working at their gardens.

"Oh dear," said the little girl, throwing down her tiny rake and hoe, "Cissy *is* so tired. And the f'owers won't grow if they isn't planted kick. Cissy is so fond of f'owers."

"So am I," said Ted, "but girls are so quickly tired. It's no good their trying to garden."

Cissy looked rather disconsolate.

"Boys shouldn't have all the f'owers," she said. "Zoo's not a summer child, Ted, zoo's a Kismas child. Zoo should have snow, and Cissy should have f'owers."

She looked at her brother rather mischievously as she said this.

"As it happens, Miss Cissy," said Ted, "there wasn't any snow the Christmas I was born. Mother told me so. And anyway, if you liked snowballs I'd let you have them, so I don't see why I shouldn't have flowers."

Cissy threw her arms round Ted's neck and kissed him. "Poor Ted," she said, "zoo shall have f'owers. But Cissy won't have any in her garden if zey isn't planted kick."

"Well, never mind. I'll help you," said Ted;

"as soon as I've done my lessons this evening, I'll work in your garden."

"Zank zoo, *dear* Ted," said Cissy rapturously, and a new hugging ensued, which Ted submitted to with a good grace, though lately it had dawned on him that he was getting rather too big for kissing.

The children's "gardens" were just under the wall that skirted their father's real garden. On the other side of this wall ran the highroad, and the lively sights and sounds to be heard and seen from the top of this same wall made the position of their own bit of ground greatly to their liking. Only the getting on to the wall! There was the difficulty. For Ted it was not so tremendous. *He* could clamber up by the help of niches which he managed to make for his feet here and there between the stones, and the consequent destruction to trousers and stockings had never as yet occurred to his boyish mind. But Cissy — poor Cissy! it was quite impossible to get *her* up on to the wall, and for some time an ambitious project had been taking shape in Ted's brain.

"Cissy," he said, when he was released, "it's no good beginning working at your garden now. We have to go in in ten minutes. I'm going up on the wall for a few minutes. You stay there, and I'll call down to you all I see."

"O Ted," said Cissy, "I *wiss* I could climb up the wall too."

"I know you do," said Ted. "I've been thinking

about that. Wait till I get up, and I'll tell you about it."

Full of faith in Ted's wisdom, little Cissy sat down by the roots of a great elm-tree which stood in her brother's domain. "My tree" Ted had always called it, and it was one of the charms of his property. *It* was not difficult to climb, even Cissy could be hoisted some way up — to the level of top of the wall indeed, without difficulty, but unfortunately between the tree and the wall there was a space, too wide to cross. And even when the right level was reached, it was too far back to see on to the road.

"If only the tree grew close to the wall," Ted had often said to himself; and now as Cissy sat down below wondering what Ted was going to do, his quick eyes were examining all about to see if a plan that had struck him would be possible.

"Cissy," he cried suddenly, and Cissy started to her feet. "Oh what, Ted?" she cried.

"I see how it could be done. If I had a plank of wood I could fasten it to the tree on one side, and — and — I could find *some* way if I tried, of fastening it to the wall on the other, and then I could pull the branches down a little — they're nearly down far enough, to make a sort of back to the seat, and oh, Cissy, it would be such a lovely place! We could both sit on it, and see all that passed. I'll tell you what I'm seeing now. There's a man with a wheelbarrow just passing, and such a queer little dog run-

ning beside, and farther off there's a boy with a basket, and two girls, and one of them's carrying a baby, and — yes, there's a cart and horse coming — awfully fast. I do believe the horse is running away. No, he's pulled it up, and — "

"O Ted," said Cissy, clasping her hands, "how *lovely* it must be! O Ted, do come down and be kick about making the place for me, for Cissy."

Just then the dinner-bell rang. Ted began his descent, Cissy eagerly awaiting him. She took his hand and trotted along beside him.

"*Do* zoo think zoo can do it, Ted?" she said.

"I must see about the wood first," said Ted, not without a little importance in his tone; "I think there's some pieces in the coach-house that would do."

At luncheon the big people, of whom there were several, for some uncles and aunts had been staying with the children's father and mother lately, noticed that Ted and Cissy looked very eager about something.

"What have you been doing with yourselves, you little people, this morning?" said one of the aunties kindly.

Cissy was about to answer, but a glance from Ted made her shut tight her little mouth again. There must be some reason for it — perhaps this delightful plan was to be a secret, for her faith in Ted was unbounded.

"We've been in the garden, in *our* gardens," Ted replied.

"Digging up the plants to see if they were growing — eh?" said an uncle who liked to tease a little sometimes.

Ted didn't mind teasing. He only laughed. Cissy looked a little, a very little offended. She did *not* like teasing, and she specially disliked any one teasing her dear Ted. Her face grew a little red.

"Ted knows about f'owers bootilly," she said; "Ted knows lots of things."

"*Cissy!*" said Ted, whose turn it was now to grow a little red, but Cissy maintained her ground.

"Ses," she said. "Ted does."

"Ted's to grow up a very clever man, isn't he, Cissy?" said her father encouragingly — "as clever as *Uncle* Ted here."

"Oh no," the little fellow replied, blushing still more, for Ted never put himself forward so as to be noticed; "I never could be that. Uncle Ted writes books with lots of counting and stick-sticks in them and — "

"Lots of *what?*" asked his uncle.

"Stick-sticks," said Ted simply. "I don't know what it means, but mother told me it was a sort of counting — like how many days in the year were fine and how many rainy."

"Or how many old women with baskets, and how many without, passed down the road this morning — eh, Ted?" said his other uncle, laughing heartily.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Ted. "Are stick-sticks any good?" he inquired, consideringly.

"It's to be hoped so," said Uncle Ted.

A bright idea struck the little fellow. He must talk it over with Cissy. If only that delightful seat between the tree and the wall was arranged *they* might make "stick-sticks"! What fun, and how pleased Uncle Ted would be! Already Ted's active brain began to plan it all. They should have a nice big ruled sheet of paper and divide it into rows, as for columns of sums: one row should be for horses alone, and one for horses with carts, and one for people, and one for children, and another for dogs, and another for wheelbarrows perhaps. And then sometimes donkeys passed, and now and then pigs even, on their way to market — yes, a lot of rows would be needed. And at the top of the paper he would write in nice big letters "stick" — no, mother would tell him how to write it nicely, he knew that wasn't quite the real word, mother would spell it for him: "St — something — of what passed the tree." It would be almost like writing a book.

He was so eager about it that he could hardly finish his dinner. For a great deal was involved in his plan, as you shall hear.

In the first place, it became evident to him after an examination of the bits of wood in the unused coach-house, that there was nothing there that would

do. He could get a nice little plank, a plank that would not scratch poor Cissy's legs or tear her frocks, from the carpenter, but then it would cost money, for Ted had gained some worldly wisdom since the days when he thought the kind shopkeepers spread out their wares for everybody to help themselves as they liked. And Ted was rather short of money, and Ted was of rather an independent spirit. He would much prefer not asking mother for any. The seat in the tree would be twice as nice if he could manage it all his own self, as Cissy would say.

Ted thought it all over a great deal, and talked about it to Cissy. It was a good thing, they agreed, that it was holiday-time just now, even though Ted had every day *some* lessons to do. And though Cissy was very little, it was, after all, she who thought of a plan for gaining some money, as you shall hear.

Some few times in their lives Ted and Cissy had seen Punch and Judy, and most delightful they thought it. Perhaps I am wrong in saying Cissy had seen it more than once, but *Ted* had, and he used to amuse Cissy by acting it over to please her. And I think it was from this that her idea came.

"Appose, Ted," she said the next day when they were out in the garden having a great consultation — "appose we make a show, and all the big people would give us pennies."

Ted considered for a minute. They were standing, Cissy and he, by the railing which at one side of their father's pretty garden divided it from some lovely fields, where sheep, with their dear little lambs skipping about beside them, were feeding. Far in the distance rose the soft blue outlines of a lofty hill, "our precious hill" Ted's mother used to call it, and indeed it was almost worthy of the name of mountain, and for this she valued it still more, as it seemed to her like a reminder of the mountain home she had loved so dearly. Ted's glance fell on it, and it carried back his thoughts to the mountain of his babyhood and the ogre stories mixed up with it in his mind. And then his thoughts went wandering away to his old "hymn book," still in a place of honour in his bookshelves, and to the fairy stories at the end of it — Cinderella and the others. He turned to Cissy with a beaming face.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Cis," he said; "we'll have a show of Beauty and the Beast. What a good idea it was of yours, Cis, to have a show."

Cissy was *greatly* flattered. Only she didn't quite like the idea of her dear Ted being the Beast. But when Ted reminded her that the Beast was *really* so good and kind, she grew satisfied.

"And how awfully pleased Percy will be when he comes to see the seat, *won't* he?" said Ted. And this thought reconciled him to what hitherto had been rather a grief to him — that Percy's holidays were shorter and fell later in the season than his.

You can imagine, children, better than I could tell what a bustle and fuss Ted and Cissy were in all that day. They looked so important, Ted's eyes were so bright, and Cissy's little mouth shut close in such a dignified way, that the big people must have been *very* stupid big people not to suspect something out of the common. But as they were very kind big people, and as they understood children and children's ways, they took care not to seem as if they did notice, and Mabel and her sister, who were also of the home party, even helped Cissy to stitch up an old muslin window curtain in a wonderful way for Beauty's dress, without making any indiscreet remarks. At which little Cissy greatly rejoiced. "*Wasn't* I clever not to let zoo find out?" she said afterwards, with immense satisfaction.

Late that evening — late for the children that is to say — about seven o'clock, for Cissy had got leave to sit up an hour longer, there came a ring at the hall bell, and a very funny-looking letter was handed in, which a boy in a muffled voice told the servant was for the ladies and gentlemen, and that she was to tell them the "act" would begin in five minutes "in the theatre hall of the day nursery." The parlour maid, who (of course!) had not the least idea in the world that the messenger was Master Ted, gravely handed the letter to Miss Mabel, who was the first person she saw, and Mabel hastened to explain to the others that its contents, quarters of old calling-cards with num-

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cries Beauty, jumping up in a Fright, "he's coming to eat me."—p. 121.

bers marked on them, were evidently meant to be tickets for the performance. The big people were all much amused, but all of course were quite ready to "assist" at the "act." They thought it better to wait a little more than five minutes before going upstairs to the theatre hall, to give Ted time to get ready before the spectators arrived, not understanding, you see, that all he had to do was to pin his father's rough brown railway rug on, to imitate the Beast. So when they at last all marched upstairs the actors were both ready awaiting them.

There was a row of chairs arranged at one side of the nursery for the visitors, and the hearth-rug, pulled out of its place, with a couple of footstools at each side, served for the stage. Scene first was Miss Beauty sitting in a corner crying, after her father had left her in the Beast's garden.

"He'll eat me up! oh, he'll eat me up!" she sobs out; and then a low growl is heard, and from a corner behind a table where no one had noticed him, a very remarkable-looking shapeless sort of dark brown lump rolls or waddles along the floor.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cries Beauty, jumping up in a fright, "he's coming to eat me."

"No, I'm not going to eat you, dear Beauty," the growly voice replies; "I'm not going to hurt you, dear Beauty. I've brought you something nice to eat for your tea. I'm sure you must be hungry;" and from somewhere or other the Beast produces a plate

with some biscuits, which he humbly lays at her feet and then waddles off again. Beauty nibbles at the biscuits, then murmuring to herself, "He's a very kind Beast," she moves away, her window-curtain train sweeping gracefully after her, behind the screen, which is supposed to represent the inside of the Beast's Castle, and where he himself has already disappeared. And this is the end of the first scene, the "act" being divided into two scenes.

The audience all clap their hands in applause.

"Capital!" and "Bravo!" they call out, so that Ted and Cissy feel their cheeks quite red, even behind the screen.

"Let's get it done quick, Cissy," said Ted; "it makes me feel so silly when they call out like that."

And the last scene is hurried on. It is not a very long one. Beauty has been away. She has gone, as everybody knows, on a visit to her old home, and on her return poor Beast is nowhere to be found. At last she discovers him lying quite still in a corner of the garden.

"Oh, poor Beast!" she exclaims, "Cis — Booty, I mean, is so sorry. Oh, poor Beast! I is afraid you is kite deaded, and I do love zoo, poor Beast," at which up jumps poor Beast, Beast no longer, for his rough skin rolls off as if by magic, and lo and behold there is Ted, got up ever so fine, with a scarlet scarf round his waist and an elegant old velvet smoking-cap with a long tassel on his head, and goodness knows what more.

"Oh, you bootiful P'ince," cries Beauty, and then they take hands and bow most politely to the audience, and then in a sudden fit of shamefacedness and shyness, they both scurry off behind the screen, Ted toppling over Cissy's long train on the way, at which there is renewed applause, and great laughter from the actors themselves. But the manager is quite up to his business. "That's all," calls out a little voice from behind the screen; "zoo may all go now, and *pay at the door*." And sure enough as the big people make their way out, there is Ted in his usual attire standing at the door, with a little basket in his hand, gracefully held out for contributions.

"Why, how did you get here already?" asks his father.

"I slipped round by the other side of the screen while you were all laughing and clapping," says Ted, looking up with a beaming face. And the pennies and sixpennies that find their way into the basket are several. When the actors count up their gains before they go to bed, they are the happy possessors of two shillings and sevenpence. Far more than enough to pay for the wood for the seat in the tree!

CHAPTER VIII.

"STATISTICS."

"Are they not busy? — the creatures!
Wanting to go to their beds? — not they!"

How delightful it was to wake the next morning and to see sparkling in the early sunshine the neat little silver coins, and the big copper ones, laid out in a row on his table! Ted jumped out of bed, not quite so early as he had intended, for he had been up rather later than usual the night before, and by the time he had had his nice cold bath and was dressed, he heard the prayer bell ring, and was only ready to take his seat as usual on a little chair in a corner of the room not far from where his dear old nurse and the other servants were placed. He liked better to sit there, for it gave him somehow a little uncomfortable feeling to see the servants quite by themselves, as it were, so separated from the family, and he had got into the way of sitting between the two sets of seats, and though little Narcissa from her perch on her mother's knee would sometimes smile and nod and beckon to him to come nearer, Ted always kept to his own place. This morning many thoughts were dancing about his brain, and it was a

little difficult for him to listen with his usual attention, even though it was one of the chapters he was very fond of, especially when his father read it in his nice clear voice. It was that one about the boy Jesus, staying behind His father and mother to talk with the learned doctors in the temple, and though some part of it puzzled Ted rather, yet he liked to listen and think about it. How frightened that father and mother must have been! How was it that Jesus knew that it was right for Him to stay behind — even though it was without His father's and mother's leave? For other little boys it would have been wrong, but then, — oh yes, of course, Jesus was not like other little boys. If only they, if only he, Ted, could learn to be more like *Him*, the one perfect Christmas child! And even the puzzling part of it grew clearer as this unconscious prayer rose out of the innocent heart. For Ted's own father and mother, even if they were frightened for a little, would not be *vexed* if he did something without their leave that was good and right. Only it was difficult to tell, very difficult — on the whole Ted felt that he understood what his mother told him about being obedient, better than he used. That was what God had given little boys fathers and mothers for, for they, when they were good and wise, could not but know best. When they were *not* good and wise, like the fathers and mothers of some of the poor London street boys he had heard of — oh, how

fearful that must be! And then as his own father's voice went on, it all came before Ted like a picture — he had once seen a picture of it, he thought — the first setting-out of old Joseph and the sweet-faced mother, the distress and fear, the delight of finding the Child again, and then the long walk home all together to the carpenter's shop in the narrow Eastern street. And, child-like, Ted's fancy turned again with the association to what was before him this morning. *He* was to go to the carpenter's to choose the wood for the seat in the tree, and oh, how delightful it would be to see it arranged, and how surprised Percy would be, and what beautiful rows of stick-sticks Cissy and he would be able to make to help Uncle Ted. All kinds of pleasant hopes and fancies were racing round Ted's brain again as he knelt down with the others to listen to the prayer that followed the reading. It was not till the murmured chorus of "Our Father," repeated all together at the end, caught his ear, that with a sudden start Ted realised that he had not been listening.

He did feel sorry and ashamed, but he was so happy that morning, the world outside was so bright and sunny, and the people inside so kind and cheerful, as they all sat round the breakfast table, that Ted's self-reproach did not last. And as soon as he had finished the short morning lessons he had to do in the holidays, he got leave from mother to go off to order the plank for the seat.

It turned out a little dearer than he had expected. Two and sevenpence were the funds in hand.

"I could give you a piece of wood for much less of course, sir," said the good-natured carpenter, who was a great ally of Ted's, "but as you explain it to me it needs something more than a bit of wood, else it wouldn't be safe for you and the young lady to sit on;" and then he showed the boy how it should be done, with a small iron bolt driven into the wall and another of a different kind fixed to the tree. "Then," said he, "it will be as safe as safe, and I'll plane you a neat little seat with no splinters or sharp edges to tear Missy's frocks."

Ted was delighted. His quick eye caught at once the carpenter's plan, and he saw how much more satisfactory and complete it would be than the rough idea he had had at first. But the price? Ted felt much afraid that here was to be the difficulty.

"How much will it cost, Mr. Newton?" he inquired anxiously.

The carpenter reflected a moment.

"Wood, so much; bolts, so much; nails; time;" Ted heard him half whispering to himself. Then he looked up.

"A matter of three shillings or so, sir," he replied. "I'll try that it shan't be more. But you see the bolts I have to buy, they're not things as we use every day. And for the time, sir, I'm not thinking

much of that. The evenings are light now. I'll try and see to it myself after work's over."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Newton," said Ted. "I think it'll be all right. But I'd like first to tell my mother how much it will cost, and then I'll run back and settle about it."

"All right, sir," the carpenter replied; and after pausing a moment at the door to pat the great big gentle dog, that was lying there blinking in the sunshine, and thinking to himself that its eyes somehow reminded him of long ago Cheviott whom Ted still remembered, though Newton's dog wasn't at all the same kind, the boy ran off again, whistling as he went, with light dancing steps down the in-and-out zigzag streets of the old town, stopping a moment, eager as he was, to admire the peeps of lovely view he came upon now and then as he turned a corner, or crossed the open market-place.

He was in great spirits. Fivepence short he felt sure could easily be made up.

"Either mother will give it me," he thought, "or she'll find some way of my earning it. I'm sure she'd like it properly done, and there'll be no fear of Cissy or me hurting ourselves."

On he danced again, for now he was in more open ground, running along the country highroad where was his home. A few cottages stood not far from where he was passing — cottages of respectable people, with several of whom sociable Ted was on

friendly terms, and just as he was nearing the first of these, a boy about his own age came out, a basket on his arm and in his hands something tied up in a cloth which he was carrying carefully. But boys will be boys!

"Good-morning, Jamie," said Ted as they met, for he recognised the boy as the son of a man living farther down the road, who had sometimes worked for his father; "where have you been, and what's that you've got?" and in pure fun Ted tapped with a switch he was carrying on the mysterious bundle.

Jamie looked up laughingly.

"O Master Ted," he was just beginning, but somehow — *how* I cannot tell, and I feel pretty sure that neither Ted nor Jamie could have told either — Ted's friendly tap had either distracted his attention so that he trod on a stone and lost his balance, or else it had destroyed the equilibrium of the bundle itself, so that almost before he had time even to say "O Master Ted," the mischief was done. Down plumped the bundle, with a crash of broken crockery, and a brown liquid at once oozed out through the cloth, making a melancholy puddle on the road. Jamie's half-spoken words changed into a cry of despair. It was the Sunday's dinner which had come to grief, the pie which his poor mother had prepared so carefully, and which he was taking home from his grandmother's, in whose oven it had been baking.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what ever *shall* I do?" cried

the poor little boy. "What will mother say? Oh dear, oh dear! — O Master Ted, what shall I do?"

Jamie's tears and sobs were pitiful. Ted, with a pale concerned face, stood beside him, speechless.

"It was all my fault, Jamie," he said at last. "It's me your mother must scold, not you. I must go home with you, and tell her it wasn't your fault."

"Oh but it were," sobbed the child. "Mother always tells me to look neither to right nor to left when I'm carrying anything like this here. Oh deary me, what ever shall I do?"

He stooped down and untied the knots of the large checked handkerchief in which the unfortunate pie had been enveloped. The dish was all in pieces, the gravy fast disappearing. Jamie gathered together, using the largest bit of the broken stoneware as a plate, some of the pieces of meat which might still be eaten, and Ted, stooping down too, helped him to the best of his ability. But it was very little that could be saved from the shipwreck. And then the two boys turned in the direction of Jamie's home, Jamie sobbing all the way, and Ted himself too appalled to know what to say to comfort him.

Jamie's mother was a busy, hard-working woman. She was kind to her children, but that is not to say that they never had a sharp word from her. And there were so many of them — more than enough to try the patience of a mother less worried by other

cares. So poor Jamie had some reason to cry, and he did not attempt to prevent Ted's going home with him — alone he would hardly have dared to face the expected scolding.

She was at the door, or just inside it, as the boys made their appearance, with a big tub before her in which she was washing up some odds and ends, without which her numerous family could not have made their usual tidy appearance at church and Sunday school the next day. For it was Saturday, often a rather trying day to heads of households in every class. But Jim's mother was in pretty good spirits. She had got on with her work, Sunday's pie had been made early and sent on to granny's, and Jamie, who was a very careful messenger, would be back with it immediately, all ready to be eaten cold with hot potatoes the next day. So Sunday's dinner was off the good woman's mind, when suddenly a startling vision met her gaze. There was Jamie, red-eyed and tearful, coming down the road, and beside him the little master from the Lawn House. What could be the matter? Jamie had not hurt *himself*, thus much was evident, but what was the small and shapeless bundle he was carrying in the handkerchief she had given him to cover the pie, and what had come over the nice clean handkerchief itself? The poor woman's heart gave a great throb of vexation.

"What ever have ye done with the pie, Jamie?"

she exclaimed first in her anxiety, though she then turned in haste to bid the little master "good-morning."

"O mother," Jamie began, his sobs bursting out afresh, but Ted put him gently aside.

"Let me tell," he said. "I came on purpose. If — if you please," he went on eagerly, though his fair face flushed a little, "it was all my fault. I gave Jim a little poke with my stick, quite in fun, and somehow it made him drop the pie. But it isn't his fault. You won't scold *him*, please, will you?"

Vexed as she was, Jamie's mother could not but feel softened. Ted's friendly ways were well known to his poorer neighbours, who with one voice pronounced him "a perfect little gentleman wherever he goes."

"It's not much use scolding," she said gently enough, but still with real distress in her tone which went to Ted's heart. "No use crying over spilt milk, as my master says. But still I do think Jamie might have been more careful. However, it can't be helped, but they'll have to do without a pie for dinner to-morrow. And thank you, Master Ted, for coming along of Jim for to tell me."

"But it wasn't Jim's fault. It was *all* mine," repeated Ted sadly. And then he bade the poor woman good-bye, and nodding to Jim, who was still wiping his eyes, though looking a good deal less frightened, the boy set off towards home again.

But how different everything looked — the sun was as bright, the air as pleasant as ten minutes before, but Ted's heart was heavy, and when at the garden gate he met his mother, who greeted him with her kind smile and asked him if he had settled with Newton about the seat, it was all poor Ted could do not to burst into tears. He was running past his mother into the house, with a hasty "Yes, thank you, mother, I'll tell you about it afterwards," for he had not yet made up his mind what he should say or do; it was his own fault, and he must suffer for it, that was his first idea, but his mother stopped him. The momentary glance at his face had been sufficient to show her that something was the matter.

"What is it, Ted, dear?" she said kindly and anxiously.

Ted's answer was a question, and a very queer question.

"Mother," he said, "how much do pies cost?"

"Pies," repeated his mother, "what kind of pies do you mean? Big ones, little ones, meat ones, or what?"

"Big ones, mother, at least *a* big one, and all made of meat, with crust at the top. And oh!" he exclaimed, "there was the dish! I dare say that cost a good deal," and his face grew sadder and sadder.

But his mother told him he really must explain, and so he did. "I didn't mean to tell you about it,

mother," he said, "for it was my own fault, and telling you seems almost like asking for the money," and here poor Ted's face grew red again. "I thought the only thing to do was to take the *act* money, the two shillings and sevenpence, you know, mother, and give it to Jamie's mother, and just give up having the seat," and here Ted's repressed feelings were too much for him. He turned away his face and fairly burst into tears. Give up the seat! Think of all that meant to him, poor boy. The pleasure for Cissy as well as his own, the delightful surprise to Percy, the rows of stick-sticks for his uncle. I don't think it was wonderful that Ted burst into tears.

"My poor boy," said his mother, and then she thought it over to herself for a little. She did not begin talking to Ted about how careless he had been, and that it must be a lesson to him, and so on, as many even very kind mothers are sometimes tempted to do, when, as *does* happen now and then in this rather contrary world, very small wrongdoings have very big results, — she could not feel that Ted had been much to blame, and she was quite sure it *would* be "a lesson to him," without her saying any more about it. So she just thought it over quietly, and then said,

"No, Ted. I don't quite think that would be right. Your giving up the seat would be punishing others as well as yourself — Cissy particularly — and

that would not be right. I will see that Jamie and his brothers and sisters have something for their dinner to-morrow that will please them as much as the pie, and you must tell Newton to go on with the seat, and — "

"But, mother," interrupted Ted, "I won't be happy unless I pay it myself, the dinner I mean. It wouldn't be *fair*, if I didn't — would it, mother?" and he looked up with his honest, anxious blue eyes in his mother's face, so that she felt the same wish to stoop down and kiss him that had made her do so long ago in the street of the little country town near their old home.

"I was going on to speak about that," said his mother. "It will take all your money and a little more to pay Newton, you see, and you haven't any more."

"No, mother, but if I was to give up my library pennies?" — for Ted subscribed a penny a week to a children's library in the town, as he had long ago exhausted the home stores.

"That would take a *very* long time, and it would be a pity for you to lose your reading," said his mother. "But I'll tell you what — I will count the dinner as owing from you to me, and you will pay it as best you can, little by little. For every summer you get presents from your uncles or cousins when they are with us. I will count it two shillings and sixpence — the sixpence for the dish, and I know you will not forget to pay me."

"No indeed, mother, and thank you *so* much," said Ted, with a now really lightened heart. "Shall I tell Jamie about the dinner? I could go that way when I go back to Newton's. He will be so pleased. His mother didn't scold him, but yet I couldn't help being *very* sorry for him. His face did look so unhappy."

And when, after dinner, Ted ran off again, I think the pleasure of the good news in store for poor Jamie was quite as much in his mind as his own errand to Newton's.

The seat was a great success. Newton came that very evening to measure it exactly, and Ted had the satisfaction of making some suggestions which the carpenter thought very good ones, as to the best way of fastening it firmly. And on Monday evening the work was accomplished. Never, surely, were two birds in a nest more happy than Ted and Cissy, when, for the first time, they mounted up on to their airy throne. Their mother, busy among her flowers, was surprised by a sound of soft singing over her head, coming from at first she could not tell where. She stood still to listen — she had, for the moment, forgotten about the perch in the tree. But the words and the tune soon told her who it was. It was Ted at his old favourite, "Home, sweet home." Sweetly and softly his boyish voice rang out. The tears came into his mother's eyes, but she moved away silently. She did not want the children to

know she was there. It seemed to take away the simplicity of his pretty singing for him to know that *any one*, even his mother, had been listening.

"He is very fond of music," she said to herself, "no doubt he has great taste for it," and the thought gave her pleasure. She pictured to herself happy future days when Ted and Cissy would be able to play and sing together — when as "big people," the brother and sister would continue the tender friendship that she liked so much to see.

Monday evening was too late to begin the important paper for Uncle Ted. But on Tuesday the children were up with the lark, armed with a long ruled sheet, divided by lines across the other way, into what Ted called several "compartments," a pencil or two, for though Cissy could not make figures, she could make little strokes, each of which stood for a one *something*. The words at the head of the "compartments" comprised everything which, with the slightest probability, *could* be expected to journey along the highroad. Men, women, boys, girls, babies in perambulators, babies in nurses' arms; old women with baskets were considered a separate genus, and had a row to themselves; carts with one horse, waggons with two, donkeys, dogs, pigs, cats, wheelbarrows. And at one side Ted carefully marked the hour at which began and ended the "observations." For, alas! the children could not be *all* day at their post, though they did gravely

purpose that they should take it in turn to go in to dinner, so that no passers-by should be unrecorded. But that mother could not agree to. Dinner must be eaten, and with as much deliberation and propriety as usual, or else what was an interest and a pleasure would have to be discouraged. And after all it was rather nice to have the paper exhibited and commented upon as they all sat round the luncheon-table, though Cissy looked as if she were not *quite* sure that she should not take offence for Ted, when one of the big people inquired why there wasn't a row for elephants and another for dancing-bears.

The long summer afternoon was spent in the same way. Never surely had such a delightful occupation for two small people brimming over with life and energy, been discovered. Two birds busied with arranging their nest could not have been more completely content.

"If this goes on," said the children's mother, laughing, when they did condescend to come in to tea, "I think we had better send a mattress and a pillow up to your seat, and let you stay there all night."

Ted and Cissy smiled, and in their hearts I rather think they were of opinion that what their mother proposed would be very nice. But, eager as they were, they were both very hungry, and it was evident that living in a tree did not destroy their appetite, for the quantity of slices of bread and butter

which disappeared would have alarmed any one unaccustomed to the feats of little people in that way.

And tea over, off they set again. It was almost as if they were away on a visit somewhere, the house seemed so quiet, and the garden, so often at that time of day the scene of tremendous romps in which even nurse herself was coaxed to join, quite deserted. *Unless* — that is to say — you had passed under a certain tree and stood still to listen to the clatter going on overhead, though, thanks to the leafy branches, there was nothing to be *seen*.

"Can there be magpies up in that tree?" would, I think, have been your first idea. And then, listening a little more attentively, you would have come to think that whether human or feathered, they were very funny magpies indeed.

"Fifteen, *sixteen*, that makes. Hurrah, sixteen dogs since ten o'clock this morning. And, let's see, seven old women with baskets, and — "

"Them wasn't all *old*," corrects the small voice of magpie number two; "Jessie wif the eggs isn't old."

"Never mind; if they've got baskets they *should* be old," replies Ted. "An old woman with a basket *sounds* right. Then there's five p'rambulators, oh, it *is* a long word to spell — it goes right out of its place into the other rows. I wish I'd just put 'babies in p'rams.' And then there's three pigs and horses, oh dear I can't count how many. It's getting too dark to see the strokes on the paper. I say, Cissy,

just you get down and run in and ask for two or three dips. We can stick them up on the wall and have a beautiful lighting up, and then we can see everybody that passes."

Down clambered obedient Cissy — she was growing very alert by this time at making her way up and down — off she set to the house with her message.

"Dips, dips," she repeated to herself. "Ted says I'm to ask for two or three dips. I wonder what dips is."

She had not the slightest idea, but it never occurred to her to do otherwise than exactly what her brother had said. It was a funny little figure that presented itself to the children's mother, in the twilight, just as she was putting away her work and thinking it was really time for Ted and Cissy to come in, a shawl wrapped round and tied behind over her white pinafore, of which the part that could be seen was by no means as clean as it might have been, any more than the eager flushed little face, with its bright dark eyes and wavy hair tumbling over the forehead.

"My dear Cissy, what a *very* dirty little girl you are," said her mother, laughing. "You really look more like a gipsy than anything else."

"Does dipsies live up trees?" inquired Cissy gravely. "Trees *is* rather dirty. But oh, mother, Ted wants me to ask you for two or three dips. *P'ease* give me zem."

"*Dips*," repeated her mother, "what in the world does he want dips for?"

"Cissy doesn't know," replied the little girl. "Cissy doesn't know what dips is. Cissy finks Ted said he would 'tick zem up on ze wall, to make it look pitty."

Her mother was very much amused.

"Dips are candles," she said. "I suppose Ted wants to light up the tree."

Her words made a light break over Cissy's face in the first place.

"Oh ses," said the little maiden, "it is getting so dark. Oh *do* give Ted some dips, *dear* mother — do, *do*."

But not any number of "do's" would have made mother agree to so dangerous a proceeding.

"My dear little girl, you would certainly set yourselves on fire, and the tree too," she replied. "But never mind," she went on, seeing the corners of Cissy's mouth going down with the thought of Ted's disappointment, "I will go out with you and explain to Ted."

Mother put a shawl over her shoulders and went out with her little girl. Some way off, Ted heard them coming.

"O Cis, have you got the dips?" he cried. "I forgot to tell you to bring some matches too. I've had such hard work to see, and a lot of people passed. I *think* there was a woman and two boys. I'll have to mark them down, when —"

"I've come with Cissy, Ted," replied his mother's voice, to his surprise, "to tell you that it would really be too much of a good thing to go on with your observations all night. And, in the first place, you would certainly set yourself and Cissy and the tree on fire, if I let you have candles up there. Come down now, that's a good boy, and show me your paper, and we'll pack it up to send to your uncle by post."

"Very well, mother," said Ted, with his usual cheery good-nature. "I'm coming. Here goes," and in another minute he was beside her. "You don't know what a beautiful long paperful I've got. I don't want you to pack it up *yet*, mother. Cissy and I are going to keep it on ever so much longer, aren't we, Cis?"

And chattering merrily the children went in with their mother. But, as she said to their father, it really is to be doubted if they would not have stayed in the tree all night, if Ted had got his wish and arranged a "dip" illumination on the top of the wall.

After all, that day in the tree was the last of their "stick-sticks." The weather changed, and there was nearly a week of rain, and by the time it was over, children-like, Ted and Cissy had grown tired of the rows of strokes representing old women and donkeys and horses, and all the rest of them; the "observations" had lost their attraction for them. Still the

pleasure was not quite over, for there was the packing of the big paper to send to Uncle Ted by post, and his letter of thanks in return. And Percy came home for the holidays, and greatly approved of the nest in the tree. And what the children did *not* do up there — what games they played, how they were by turns Robinson Crusoe hiding from the savages, King Charles in the oak at Boscobel, or, quainter still, how they all sometimes suddenly turned into squirrels and manufactured for themselves the most wonderful tails of old brush handles, and goodness only knows what, which stuck straight up behind and made the climbing to the nest by no means an easy matter — yes indeed, what they did *not* do up in the tree would be difficult to tell.

But it comes into my mind just now that I have never told you anything of Ted's indoor life. Hitherto it has seemed all summer days and gardens, has it not? And no doubt the boy's *greatest* happiness was in outdoor interests and employments. But of course it was not always summer and sunshine for Ted, any more than for any one else — and, Christmas child though he was, there were wintry days when even *he* had to stay in the house and find work and pleasures indoors. For winter does not mean nothing but bright frosty skies overhead, and crisp clean snow underfoot. There are dreary days of rain and mist and mud, when children are much better at home, and when mothers and nurses are more thank-

ful than any one *not* a mother or nurse can imagine, to have to do with cheerful contented little people, who are "good at amusing themselves," and unselfish enough not to worry every one about them because it is a rainy day.

CHAPTER IX.

A PEACOCK'S FEATHER AND A KISS.

"We tried to quarrel yesterday.
Ah! . . . kiss the memory away."

In Ted's pleasant home there was a queer little room used for nothing in particular. It was a very little room, hardly worthy indeed of the name, but it had, like some small men who have very big minds, a large window with a most charming view. I think it was partly this which made Ted take such a fancy to this queer little room in the first place — he used to stand at the window when they first came to the house and gaze out at the stretch of sloping fields, with peeps here and there of the blue river fringed with splendid trees, and farther off still the distant hills fading away into the mysterious cloudiness, the sight of which always gave him a strange feeling as if he would like to cry — Ted used to gaze out of this window for ever so long at a time, till somehow the little room came to be associated with him, and the rest of the family got into the way of speaking of it as his. And gradually an idea took shape in his mind which he consulted his mother about, and which she was quite pleased to agree to.

Might he have this little room for his museum? That was Ted's idea, and oh how eagerly his blue eyes looked up into his mother's face for her reply, and how the light danced in them with pleasure when she said "yes."

There were shelves in the little room — shelves not too high up, some of them at least, for Ted to arrange his curiosities on, without having to climb on to a chair, and even Cissy, when she was trusted as a great treat to dust some of the treasures, could manage nicely with just a footstool. It would be impossible to tell you half the pleasure Ted got out of his museum. It was to him a sort of visible history of his simple happy life, for nowhere did he go without bringing back with him some curious stone or shell, or bird's feather, or uncommon leaf even, to be placed in his collection, both as a remembrance of his visit and as a thing of interest in itself.

There were specimens of cotton in its different stages, of wool too, from a soft bit of fluff which Ted had picked off a Welsh bramble, to a square inch of an exquisitely knitted Shetland shawl, fine as a cobweb, which Ted had begged from Mabel when she was giving the remains of the shawl to Cissy for her doll. There were bits of different kinds of coal; there was "Blue John" from a Derbyshire cavern, and a tiny china doll which, much charred and disfigured, had yet survived the great fire of Chicago, where one of the children's uncles had passed by

not long after; there was a bit of black bread from the siege of Paris; there were all manner of things, all ticketed and numbered, and their description neatly entered in a catalogue which lay on a little table by the door, on which was also to be seen another book, in which Ted requested all visitors to the museum to write their names, and all the big people of the family so well understood the boy's pride and pleasure in his museum, that no one ever thought of making his way into his little room without his invitation.

Ted had begun his museum some months before the great excitement of the nest in the tree, but the delights of the long summer days out of doors had a little put it out of his head. But the latter part, as well as the beginning of these holidays, happened to be very rainy, and the last fortnight was spent mostly by Percy and Ted in the tiny museum room, where Percy helped Ted to finish the ticketing and numbering that he had not long before begun. And Cissy, of course, was as busy as anybody, flopping about with an old pocket-handkerchief which she called her duster, and reproving the boys with great dignity for unsettling any of the trays she had made so "bootily clean."

"You must try to get some more feathers, Ted," said Percy. "They make such a pretty collection. There's a fellow at our school that has an awful lot. He fastens them on to cards — he's got a bird-of-

Paradise plume, an awful beauty. Indeed he's got two, for he offered to sell me one for half-a-crown. Wouldn't you like it?"

"I should think I would," said Ted, "but I can't buy anything this half. You know my money's owing to mother for that that I told you about."

He gave a little sigh; the bird of Paradise was a tempting idea.

"*Poor* Ted," said Cissy, clambering down from her stool to give him a hug.

Ted accepted the hug, but not the pity.

"No, Cissy. I'm not poor Ted for that," he said merrily. "It was ever so kind of mother to put it all right, and ever so much kinder of her to do it that way. I shouldn't have liked not to pay it myself."

"I'll see if I can't get that fellow to swop his bird of Paradise for some of my stamps, when I go back to school," said Percy.

"Oh, thank you, Percy," said Ted, his eyes shining.

"Anyway you might have some peacocks'," Percy went on. "They're not so hard to get, and they look so pretty."

"Mother's got some screens made of them on the drawing-room mantelpiece," said Ted, "and one of them's got a lot of loose feathers sticking out at the back that are no use. Perhaps she'd give me one or two. Then I could make a nice cardful, with the

peacocks' at the corners and the little ones in a sort of a wreath in the middle."

He looked at the sheet of white paper on to which, at present, his feathers were fastened. "Yes, it would be very pretty," he repeated. But just then the tea-bell rang, and the children left the museum for that day.

The boys were in it the next morning, when Ted's mother appeared with a rather graver face than usual. She did not come in, she knew that Ted was putting all in perfect order, and that he did not want her to see it till complete, so she only slightly opened the door and called him out.

"Ted," she said quietly, but Ted saw that she was sorry, "Ted, do you know anything of this?"

She held up as she spoke a pretty and valuable little china ornament which always stood on the drawing-room mantelpiece. It was broken — quite spoilt — it could never be the same again.

"Oh dear," exclaimed Ted, "what a pity! Your dear little flower-basket. I am so sorry. How could it have got broken?"

"I don't know," said his mother. "I found it lying on the floor. It seemed as if some one had knocked it over without knowing. You are sure you were not trying to reach anything off the mantelpiece yesterday evening?"

"Sure," said Ted, looking sorry and puzzled.

"It stood just in front of my screen of peacock

feathers," his mother went on. She did not in the very very least doubt his assurance, but his manner gave her the feeling that if she helped his memory a little, he might be able to throw some light on the mystery.

"In front of the peacock-feather fan," he repeated absently.

"Yes," said his mother, "but do not say anything about it, Ted. We may find out how it happened, but I do not like questioning every one about it. It gives the servants a feeling that I don't trust them, for they always tell me if they break anything. So don't say anything more about it to *any one*."

"No," said Ted. His tone and manner were still a little puzzled, as if something was in his mind which he could not make clear to himself, and his mother, knowing that he sometimes was inclined to take things of the kind too much to heart, made up her mind to think no more about her poor little vase, and to treat its breakage as one of the accidents we have all to learn to bear philosophically in daily life. But though no more was said, Ted did not forget about it: it worried and puzzled him behind other thoughts, as it were, all day, and little did he or his mother think who was really the innocent culprit.

Late that night, just before going to bed herself, Ted's mother glanced into his room, as she often did, to see that the boy was sleeping peacefully.

The light that she carried she shaded carefully, but a very wide-awake voice greeted her at once.

"Mother," it said, "I'm not asleep. Mother, I do so want to speak to you. I've not been able to go to sleep for thinking about the little broken vase."

"O Ted, dear," said his mother, "don't mind about it. It is no use vexing oneself so much about things when they are done and can't be put right."

"But, mother," he persisted, "it isn't quite that. Of course I'm *very* sorry for it to be broken, however it happened. But what makes me so uncomfortable is that I've begun to wonder so if perhaps I *did* do it. I know we were all talking about your peacock-feather screens yesterday. I said to Percy and Cissy there were some loose ones in one of them, and perhaps you'd give me some for my card of feathers, and I've got a sort of wondering feeling whether perhaps I *did* touch the screen and knocked down the china flower-basket without knowing, and it's making me so unhappy, but I *didn't* mean to hide it from you if I did do it."

He looked up so wistfully that his mother's heart felt quite sore. She considered a minute before she replied, for she was afraid of seeming to make light of his trouble or of checking his perfect honesty, and yet, on the other hand, she was wise, and knew that even conscientiousness may be exaggerated and grow into a weakness, trying to others as well as hurtful to oneself.

"I am sure you did not mean to hide anything from me, dear Ted," she replied, "and I don't think it is the least likely that you did break the vase. But even if you did, it is better to think no more about it. You answered me sincerely at the time, and that was all you could do. We are only human beings, you now, dear Ted, always likely to make mistakes, even to say what is not true at the very moment we are most anxious to be truthful. We can only do our best, and ask God to help us. So don't trouble any more, even if we never find out how it happened."

Then she stooped and gave Ted an extra good-night kiss, and in five minutes his loving anxious little spirit was asleep.

But the very next day the mystery was explained.

"Ted's *new*seum is bootly neat," Cissy announced at breakfast-time, "but he wants some more fevvers. I tried to get down muzzer's screen off the mantel-piece to see if there was some loose ones, but I couldn't reach it. Muzzer, *won't* you give Ted some loose ones?"

Mother looked at Ted, and Ted looked at mother.

"So *you* were the mouse that knocked over my little vase, Miss Cissy!" said mother. "Do you know, dear, that it was broken? You should not try to reach things down yourself. You will be having an accident, like 'Darling' in the picture-book, some day, if you don't take care."

. "They were neatly tacked on to the Feather Card, which had a very Fine Effect on the Wall of the Museum."—p. 153.

The corners of Cissy's mouth went down, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I didn't know," she said in a very melancholy voice. "I only wanted to find some loose fevvers for Ted."

"I know that, dear," said her mother. "Only if you had asked me you would have got the feathers without breaking my vase. Come with me now, and you'll show me what you want."

There proved to be two or three loose feathers as Ted had said — beautiful rainbow eyes, which would not be missed from the screen with the careful way in which Ted's mother cut them out, and the children carried them off in delight. They were neatly tacked on to the feather card, which had a very fine effect on the wall of the museum. And for both Ted and Cissy there was a little lesson, though the two were of different kinds, fastened up with the feathers on the card.

Before long the holidays were over. Percy went back to school, and poor Ted hid himself for a few hours, as he always did on these sad occasions, that his red eyes might not be seen. Then he came out again, looking paler than usual, but quite cheerful and bright. Still he missed Percy so much that he was not at all sorry that his own holidays were over. For Ted now went early every morning to a regular big school — a school at which there were so many boys that some little fellows of his age might have

felt frightened and depressed. But not so Ted. He went on his own cheery way without misgiving. The world to his thinking was a nice and happy place — not *all* sunshine of course, but very good of its kind. And school-life, though it too had its shadows, was full of interest and satisfaction. Ted loved his fellows, and never doubted, in his simple taking-for-granted of things being as they should be, but that he was loved by them; and how this way of looking out on the world helped him through its difficulties, how it saved him from unreasonable fears and exaggerated anxieties such as take the bloom off many a child-life, it would be difficult for me to describe. I can only try to put you in the way of imagining this bright young life for yourselves.

The boy whom, of course only *next* to his dear Percy, Ted loved best in the world was, to use his own words, "a fellow" of about his own age, whose name was Rex. That is to say, his short name; for his real one was Reginald, just as Ted's was Edmond. They had been together at the big school from the first of Ted's going, being about equal in their standing as to classes, though Rex was rather the elder, and had been longer at school. At Ted's school, as at all others, there were quarrels and fights sometimes; and many a day he came home with traces of war, in the shapes of bumps and bruises and scratches. Not that the battles were all *quarrels*,— there were plenty of good-tempered scrimmages, as

well as, occasionally, more serious affrays, for boys will be boys all the world over. And, worse than that, in all schools there are to be found boys of mean and tyrannical spirit, who love to bully and tease, and who need to be put down now and then. And in all schools, too, there are boys of good and kindly feelings, but of hasty and uncontrolled temper, and they too have to be taught to give and take, to bear and forbear. And then, too, as the best of boys are *but* boys after all, we are still a long way off having any reason to expect that the best of schools even can be like dovecots.

I don't know that Ted's school was worse than others in these respects, and Ted himself was not of a quarrelsome nature, but still in some ways he was not very patient. And then, slight and rather delicate though he was, he assuredly had a spirit of his own. He couldn't stand bullying, either of himself or others, and without any calculation as to the odds for or against him, he would plunge himself into the thick of the fray; and but for Rex, who was always ready to back up Ted, I dare say he would often have come off worse than he did. As it was, many were the wounds that fell to his share, and yet he managed, by his quickness and nimbleness, to escape more serious damage.

"What have you been doing with yourself, my boy?" his mother said one day not long after the grand doing-up of the museum, when Ted appeared

in her room on his return from school, to beg for some sticking-plaister and arnica lotion. He really looked rather an object, and he could not help laughing as he caught sight of his face in the glass; for one eye was very much swollen, and a long scratch down his nose did not add to his beauty.

"I *am* a fright," he said. "But there's not much the matter, mother. It was only a scrimmage — we were all quite good friends."

"But really, Ted," said his mother, "I think you must curb your warlike tastes a little. Some day you may really get hurt badly."

"No fear, mother," he said. "Besides, after all, a boy wouldn't be worth much who couldn't fight sometimes, would he?"

"*Sometimes*," said his mother. "Where was Rex to-day — wasn't he beside you?"

Ted's face clouded a little.

"Rex was in a bad humour to-day. He wouldn't play," Ted replied.

"Rex in a bad humour!" repeated his mother. "Surely that's very uncommon."

Ted did not reply, and his mother did not ask him any more, but she noticed that the cloud had not entirely disappeared, and the next morning it was not quite with his usual springing steps that the boy set off to school. Rex's house was on the same road; most days the boys met each other at the gate and went on together, but this time no Rex was to

be seen. Either he had taken it into his head to go very early, or he was not yet ready. Ted cast a glance towards the path, down which he was used to see his friend running, satchel over his shoulders, to join him — then he walked on slowly.

"I'm not going to wait for him if he doesn't care to come," he said to himself; and when he got to school he was glad he had not done so, for there was Rex already in the schoolroom, and at his desk busy writing, though it wanted some minutes to school-time.

"Good-morning, Rex," said Ted.

"Good-morning," replied Rex; but that was all. Whether or not he had been in a bad humour the day before, he was certainly not in a pleasant frame of mind towards Ted *to-day*. The morning passed much less cheerfully than usual, for when all was happy between the boys, though they could not speak to each other in school hours, there were many pleasant little ways in which they could make each other feel that his friend was next door. Ted's lessons suffered from his preoccupation, and, altogether, things seemed to go the wrong way. But Ted did not seem able to care. "What was the matter with Rex?" That was the one question always in his mind.

School over, the boys could not help meeting. Their roads lay together, and both had too much self-respect to wish to make an exhibition of the

want of good-feeling between them to the other boys. So they set off as if nothing were the matter, and walked some little way in silence. At last Ted could stand it no longer.

"What's the matter with you, old fellow?" he said. "Why wouldn't you play with me yesterday?"

Rex looked up.

"I couldn't," he said. "I had got my French exercise all blotted, and I wanted to copy it over without telling any one; that was why I wouldn't come out. So *now* you see if it was true what you said of me to Hatchard."

"What did I say of you to Hatchard?" cried Ted.

"*What?* Why, what he told me you said — that I was a mean sneak, and that I wouldn't play because I wasn't as good at it as you."

"I never said so, and you know I never did," retorted Ted, his cheeks flaming.

"Do you mean to say that I'm telling a lie?" cried Rex in his turn.

"Yes I do, if you said I said that," exclaimed Ted. And then — how it happened I don't think either of the boys could have told — their anger grew from words into deeds. Rex hit Ted, and Ted hit at him again! But one blow — one on each side — and they came to their senses. Ted first, when he saw the ugly mark his clenched fist had left on his friend's face, when he felt the hot glow on his own.

"O Rex," he cried, "O Rex! How can we be like

that to each other? It's like Cain and Abel. O Rex, I'm so sorry!"

And Rex was quick to follow.

"O Ted, I didn't mean it. Let's forget we ever did it. I *do* believe you never said that. Hatchard's a mean sneak himself. I only didn't want to tell you that it was you who blotted my exercise by mistake when you passed my desk. I thought you'd be so sorry. But it would have been better to tell you than to go on like this."

Rex's explanation was too much for Ted. Ten years old though he was, the tears rushed to his eyes, and he felt as if he could never forgive himself.

He told his mother all about it that evening. He could not feel happy till he did so, and even before he had said anything she knew that the little tug to her sleeve and the whispered "Mother, I want to speak to you," was coming. And even when he had told her all about the quarrel and reconciliation, he hung on, looking as if there were something more to tell.

"What is it, my boy?" said his mother; "have you anything more to say?"

Ted's face flushed.

"Yes, mother," he said. "I wanted to ask you this. When Rex and I had settled it all right again, we still felt rather unhappy. It did seem so horrid to have hit each other like that, it seemed to leave a mark. So, mother, we wanted to take it

quite away, and we *kissed* each other. And we felt quite happy, only — was it a very babyish thing to do? Was it *unmanly*, mother?"

His mother drew him towards her and looked lovingly into his anxious face.

"Unmanly, my boy? No indeed," she said, "it was kind and good, and kindness and goodness can never be unmanly."

And Ted, quite at rest now, went off to bed.

CHAPTER X.

SOME RAINY ADVENTURES.

"Wildly the winds of heaven began to blow,
* * * * * *
Whilst from the jealous, unrelenting skies
The inevitable July down-pour came."

ANOTHER winter came and went. Ted had another birthday, which made him eleven years old. Another happy Christmas time — this year of the old-fashioned snowy kind, for even in November there was skating, and Ted skated like a Dutchman; and the child-life in the pleasant home went on its peaceful way, with much of sunshine and but few clouds. Narcissa, too, was growing a big girl. She could say all her words clearly now, without lisping or funny mistakes, though, as she was the youngest bird in the nest, I am not sure but that some of the big people thought this rather a pity! And then when the frost and the snow were done with, the ever new spring time came round again, gradually growing into the brilliant summer; and this year the children's hearts rejoiced even more than usual, for a great pleasure was before them. This year they were to spend the holidays with their parents in a quite, *quite* country place, and many were the

delightful fancies and dreams that they made about it, even while it was some distance off.

"I do love summer," said Cissy one day. They were standing at the window one May morning, waiting for their father and mother to come to breakfast. It was a Sunday morning, so there was no hurrying off to school. "Don't you *love* summer, Ted?"

"Yes, summer's awfully jolly," he replied. "But so's winter. Just think of the snowballing and the skating. I do hope next winter will be a regular good one, for I shall be ever so much bigger I expect, and I'll try my best to beat them all at skating."

His face and eyes beamed with pleasure. Just then his mother came in; she had heard his last words.

"Next winter!" she said. "That's a long time off. Who knows what may happen before then?"

She gave a little sigh; Ted and Cissy looked at each other. They knew what mother was thinking of. Since *last* winter a great grief had come to her. She had lost one who had been to her what Ted was to Cissy, and the sorrow was still fresh. Ted and Cissy drew near to their mother. Ted stroked her hand, and Cissy held up her rosy mouth for a kiss.

"Dear mother," they said both together, and then a little silence fell over them all. Cissy's thoughts were sad as she looked at Ted and pictured to her-

self how terrible it would be to lose a brother as dear as he, and Ted was gazing up at the blue sky and *wondering* — wondering about the great mystery which had lately, for the first time in his life, seemed to come near him. What *was* dying? Why, if it meant, as his father and mother told him, a better, and fuller, and nobler life than this, which he found so good and happy a thing, why, if it meant living nearer to God, understanding Him better, why should people dread it so, why speak of it as so sad?

"I don't think," thought little Ted to himself, "I don't *think* I should be afraid of dying. God is so kind, I couldn't fancy being afraid of Him; and heaven must be so beautiful," for the sunny brightness of the May morning seemed to surround everything. But his glance fell on his mother and sister, and other thoughts rose in his mind; the leaving them — ah yes, *that* was what made death so sad a thing; and he had to turn his head away to hide the tears which rose to his eyes.

There was, as his mother had said, a long time to next winter — there seemed even, to the children, a long time to next summer, which they were hoping for so eagerly. And an interruption came to Ted's school-work, for quite unexpectedly he and Cissy went away to London for a few weeks with their parents, and when they came back there was only a short time to wait for the holidays. If I had space I would like to tell you about this visit to London, and

some of the interesting things that happened there — how the children had rather a distressing adventure the first evening of their arrival, for their father and mother had to go off with their aunt in a hurry to see a sick friend, and, quite by mistake, their nurse, not knowing the children would be alone, went out with a message about a missing parcel, and poor Cissy, tired with the journey and frightened by the dark, rather gloomy house and the strange servants, had a terrible fit of crying, and clung to Ted as her only protector in a manner piteous to see. And Ted soothed and comforted her as no one else could have done. It was a pretty sight (though it grieved their mother too, to find that poor Cissy had been frightened) to see the little girl in Ted's arms, where she had fallen asleep, the tears still undried on her cheeks; and the next morning, when she woke up fresh and bright as usual, she told her mother that Ted had been, oh so kind, she never could be frightened again if Ted was there.

There were many things to surprise and interest the children, Ted especially, in the great world of London, of which now he had this little peep. But as I have promised to tell you about the summer I must not linger.

When they went back from town there were still eight or nine weeks to pass before the holidays, and Ted worked hard, really very hard, at school to gain the prize he had been almost sure of before the in-

terruption of going away. He did not say much about it, but his heart *did* beat a good deal faster than usual when at last the examinations were over and the prize-giving day came round; and when all the successful names were read out and his was not among them, I could not take upon myself to say that there was not a tear to wink away, even though there was the consolation of hearing that he stood second-best in his class. And Ted's good feeling and common sense made him look quite bright and cheerful when his mother met him with rather an anxious face.

"You're not disappointed I hope, Ted, dear, are you?" she said. "You have not taken quite as good a place as usual, and I did think you might have had a prize. But you know I am quite pleased, and so is your father, for we are satisfied you have done your best, so you must not be disappointed."

"I'm not, mother," said Ted cheerily, — "I'm not really, for you know I am *second*, and that's not bad, is it? Considering I was away and all that."

And his mother felt pleased at the boy's good sense and fair judgment of himself — for there had sometimes seemed a danger of Ted's entire want of vanity making him too timid about himself.

What a happy day it was for Ted and Cissy when the real packing began for the summer expedition! It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and I suppose it is by this old saying explained how it is

that packing, the horror of mothers and aunts and big sisters, not to speak of nurses and maids, should be to all small people the source of such delight.

"See, Ted," said Cissy, "do let's carry down some of these boxes. There's the one with the sheets and towels in, *quite* ready," and the children's mother coming along the passage and finding them both tugging with all their might at really a very heavy trunk, was reminded of the day — long ago now — in the mountain home, when, setting off for the picnic, wee Ted wanted so much to load himself with the heaviest basket of all!

And at last, thanks no doubt to these energetic efforts in great part, the packing was all done; the last evening, then the last night came, and the excited children went to sleep to wake ever so much earlier than usual to the delights of thinking *the* day had come!

It was a long and rather tiring railway journey, and when it came to an end there was a very long drive in an open carriage, and by degrees all houses and what Ted's father called "traces of civilisation," — which puzzled Cissy a good deal — were left behind.

"We must be getting close to the moors," said he, at which the children were delighted, for it was on the edge of these great moors that stood the lonely farm-house that was to be their home for some months. But just as their father said this,

the carriage stopped, and they were told they must all get down — they were at the entrance to a wood through which there was no cart or carriage road, only a footpath, and the farm-house stood in a glen some little way on the other side of this wood. It was nearly dark outside the wood, inside it was of course still more so, so dark indeed that it took some care and management to find one's way at all. The children walked on quietly, Ted really enjoying the queerness and the mystery of this adventure, but little Narcissa, though she said nothing, pressed closer to her mother, feeling rather "eerie," and some weeks after she said one day, "I don't want ever to go home again because of passing through that dark wood."

But once arrived, the pleasant look of everything at the farm-house, and the hearty welcome they received from their host and hostess, the farmer and his wife, made every one feel it had all been worth the journey and the trouble. And the next morning, when the children woke to a sunny summer day in the quaint old house, and looked out on all sides on the lovely meadows and leafy trees, with here and there a peep of the gleaming river a little farther down the glen, and when, near at hand, they heard the clucking of the hens and the mooing of the calves and the barking of the dogs, and all the delightful sounds of real farm-life, I think, children, you will not need me to try to tell you how happy

our children felt. The next few days were a sort of bewilderment of interests and pleasures and surprises — everything was so nice and new — even the funny old-fashioned stoneware plates and dishes seemed to Ted and Cissy to make the dinners and teas taste better than anything they had ever eaten before. And very soon they were as much at home in and about the farm-house as if they had lived there all their lives, — feeding the calves and pigs, hunting for eggs, carrying in wood for Mrs. Crosby to help her little niece Polly, a small person not much older than Cissy, but already very useful in house and farm work. One day, when they were busy at this wood-carrying, a brilliant idea struck them.

"Wouldn't it be fun," said Ted, "to go to the wood — just the beginning of it, you know — and gather a lot of these nice little dry branches; they are so beautiful for lighting fires with?"

Cissy agreed that it would be great fun, and Polly, who was with them at the time, thought, too, that it would be very nice indeed; and then a still better idea struck Ted. "Suppose," he said, "that we were to go to-morrow morning, and take our luncheon with us. Wouldn't *that* be nice? We could pack it in a basket and take it on the little truck that we get the wood in, and then we could bring back the little truck full of the dry branches."

The proposal was thought charming, and mother

was consulted; and the next morning Mrs. Crosby was busy betimes, hunting up what she could give to her "honeys" for their picnic, and soon the three set off, pulling the truck behind them, and on the truck a basket carefully packed with a large bottle of fresh milk, a good provision of bread and butter, a fine cut of home-made cake, and three splendid apple turnovers. Could anything be nicer? The sun was shining, as it was right he should shine on so happy a little party, as they made their way up the sloping field, through a little white gate opening on to a narrow path skirting the foot of the hill, where the bracken grew in wild luxuriance, and the tall trees overhead made a pleasant shade down to the little beck, whose chatter could be faintly heard. And so peaceful and sheltered was the place, that, as the children passed along, bright-eyed rabbits stopped to peep at them ere they scudded away, and the birds hopped fearlessly across the path, nay, the squirrels even, sitting comfortably among the branches, glanced down at the three little figures without disturbing themselves, and an old owl blinked at them patronisingly from his hole in an ancient tree-trunk. And bye-and-bye as the path grew more rugged, Polly was deputed to carry the basket, for fear of accidents, for Cissy pulling in front and Ted pushing and guiding behind, found it as much as they could do to get the truck along. How they meant to bring it back when loaded with branches I

don't know, and as things turned out, the question did not arise. The truck and the basket and the children reached their destination safely; they chose a nice little grassy corner under a tree very near the entrance to the big wood, and after a *very* short interval of rest from the fatigues of their journey, it was suggested by one and agreed to by all that even if it were rather too early for real luncheon or dinner time, there was no reason why, if they felt hungry, they should not unpack the basket and eat! No sooner said than done.

"We shall work at gathering wood all the better after we've had some refreshment," observed Ted sagely, and the little girls were quite of his opinion. And the rabbits and the owls and the squirrels must, I think, have been much amused at the quaint little party, the spice-cake and apple-turnover collation that took place under the old tree, and at the merry words and ringing laughter that echoed through the forest.

An hour or so later, the children's mother, with an after-thought of possible risk to them from the damp ground, made her way along the path and soon discovered the little group. She had brought with her a large waterproof cloak big enough for them all to sit on together, but it was too late, for the refection was over; the basket, containing only the three plates and the three tin mugs, propped up between Ted and Cissy, toppled over with the start the chil-

dren gave at the sound of their mother's voice, and a regular "Jack and Jill" clatter down the slope was the result. The children screamed with delight and excitement as they raced after the truant mugs and plates, and their mother, thinking that her staying longer might cause a little constraint in the merriment, turned to go, just saying cheerfully, "Children, I have brought my big waterproof cloak for you to sit on, but as your feast is over I suppose you won't need it. What are you going to do next?"

"O mother, we're just going to set to work," Ted's voice replied; "we're having such fun."

"Well, good-bye then. I am going a walk with your father, but in case of a change of weather, though it certainly doesn't look like it, I'll leave the cloak."

She turned and left them. An hour or two later, when she came home to the farm-house and stood for a moment looking up at the sky, it seemed to her as if her remark about the weather had been a shadow of coming events. For the bright blue sky had clouded over, a slight chilly breeze ruffled the leaves as if in friendly warning to the birds and the butterflies to get under shelter, and before many moments had passed large heavy drops began to fall, which soon grew into a regular downpour. What a changed world!

"What will the children do?" was the mother's

first thought as she watched it. "It is too heavy to last, and fortunately there is no sign of thunder about. I don't see that there is anything to be done but to wait a little; they are certain to be under shelter in the wood, and any one going for them would be drenched in two minutes."

So she did her best to wait patiently and not to feel uneasy, though several times in the course of the next half-hour she went to the window to see if there were no sign of the rain abating. Alas, no! As heavily as ever, and even more steadily, it fell. Something must be done she decided, and she was just thinking of going to the kitchen to consult Mrs. Crosby, when as she turned from the window a curious object rolling or slowly hobbling down the hillside caught her view. That was the way the children would come — what could that queer thing be? It was not too high, but far too broad to be a child, and its way of moving was a sort of jerky waddle through the bracken, very remarkable to see. Whatever it was, dwarf or goblin, it found its way difficult to steer, poor thing, for there, with a sudden fly, over it went altogether and lay for a moment or two struggling and twisting, till at last it managed to get up again and painfully strove to pursue its way.

The children's mother called their nurse.

"Esther," she said, "I cannot imagine what that creature is coming down the road. But it is in

trouble evidently. Run off and see if you can help." Off ran kind-hearted Esther, and soon she was rewarded for her trouble. For as she got near to the queer-shaped bundle, she saw two pairs of eyes peering out at her, from the two arm-holes of the waterproof cloak, and in a moment the mystery was explained. Ted, in his anxiety for the two girls, had wrapped them up *together* in the cloak which his mother had left, and literally "bundled" them off, with the advice to get home as quickly as possible, while he followed with his loaded truck, the wood covered as well as he could manage with leafy branches which he tore down.

But "possible" was not quickly at all in the case of poor Cissy and her companion. Polly was of a calm and placid nature, with something of the resignation to evils that one sees in the peasant class all over the world; but Narcissa, impulsive and sensitive, with her dainty dislike to mud, and her unaccustomedness to such adventures, could not long restrain her tears, and under the waterproof cloak she cried sadly, feeling frightened too at the angry gusts of rain and wind which sounded to her like the voices of ogres waiting to seize them and carry them off to some dreadful cavern.

The summit of their misfortunes seemed reached when they toppled over and lay for a moment or two helplessly struggling on the wet ground. But oh, what delight to hear Esther's kind voice, and

how Cissy clung to her and sobbed out her woes! She was more than half comforted again by the time they reached the farm-house, and just as mother was considering whether it would not be better to undress them in the kitchen before the fire and bring down their dry clothes, Master Ted, "very wet, yes very wet, oh very wet indeed," made his appearance, with rosy cheeks and a general look of self-satisfaction.

"Did they get home all right?" he said, cheerily. "It *was* a good thing you brought the cloak, mother. And the wood isn't so wet after all."

And an hour or two later, dried and consoled and sitting round the kitchen table for an extra good tea to which Mrs. Crosby had invited them, all the children agreed that after all the expedition had not turned out badly.

But the weather had changed there was no doubt; for the time at least the sunny days were over. The party in the farm-house had grown smaller too, for the uncles had had to leave, and even the children's father had been summoned away unexpectedly to London. And a day or two after the children's picnic their mother stood at the window rather anxiously looking out at the ever-falling rain.

"It really looks like as if it would *never* leave off," she said, and there was some reason for her feeling distressed. She had hoped for a letter from the children's father that day, and very probably it

"Master Ted, very wet indeed, made his Appearance with Rosy Cheeks and a General Look of Self-satisfaction." — p. 174.

was lying at the two-miles-and-a-half-off post-office, waiting for some one to fetch it. For it was not one of the postman's days for coming round by the farm-house; that only happened twice a week, but hitherto this had been of little consequence to the farm-house visitors. Their letters perhaps had not been of such importance as to be watched for with much anxiety, and in the fine weather it was quite a pleasant little walk to the post-office by the fields and the stepping-stones across the river. But all this rain had so swollen the river that now the stepping-stones were useless; there was nothing for it but to take the long round by the road; and this added to the difficulty in another way, for it was not by any means every day that Mr. Crosby or his son were going in that direction, or that they could, at this busy season, spare a man so long off work. So the children's mother could not see how she was to get her letter if this rain continued — at least not for several days, for the old postman had called yesterday — he would not take the round of the Skensdale farm for other three or four days at least, and even then, the post-office people were now so accustomed to some of the "gentry" calling for their letters themselves, that it was doubtful, not certain at least, if they would think of giving them to the regular carrier. And with some anxiety, for her husband had gone to London on business of importance, Ted's mother went to bed.

Early next morning she was awakened by a tap at the door, a gentle little tap. She almost fancied she had heard it before in her sleep without being really aroused.

"Come in," she said, and a very business-like figure, which at the first glance she hardly recognised, made its appearance. It was Ted; dressed in waterproof from head to foot, cloak, leggings, and all, he really looked ready to defy the weather — a sort of miniature diver, for he had an oilskin cap on his head too, out of which gleamed his bright blue eyes, full of eagerness and excitement.

"Mother," he said, "I hope I haven't wakened you too soon. I got up early on purpose to see about your letters. It's still raining as hard as ever, and even if it left off, there'd be no crossing the stepping-stones for two or three days, Farmer Crosby says. And he can't spare any one to-day to go to the post. I'm the only one that *can*, so I've got ready, and don't you think I'd better go at once?"

Ted's mother looked out of the window. Oh, how it was pouring! She thought of the long walk — the two miles and a half through the dripping grass of the meadows, along the muddy, dreary road, and all the way back again; and then the possibility of the swollen river having escaped its bounds where the road lay low, came into her mind and frightened her. For Ted was a little fellow still — only eleven and a half, and slight and delicate for his age. And

then she looked at him and saw the eager readiness in his eyes, and remembered that he was quick-witted and careful, and she reflected also that he must learn, sooner or later, to face risks and difficulties for himself.

"Ted, my boy," she said, "it's very nice of you to have thought of it, and I know it would be a great disappointment if I didn't let you go. But you'll promise me to be very careful — to do nothing rash or unwise; if the river is over the road, for instance, or there is the least danger, you'll turn back?"

"Yes, mother, I'll be very careful, really," said Ted. "I'll do nothing silly. Good-bye, mother; thank you so much for letting me go. I've got my stick, but there's no use taking an umbrella."

And off he set; his mother watching him from the window as far as she could see him, trudging bravely along — a quaint little figure — through the pouring rain. For more than a mile she could see him making his way along the meadow path, gradually lessening as the distance increased, till a little black speck was all she could distinguish, and then it too disappeared round the corner.

And an hour or so later, there were warm, dry boots and stockings before the fire, which even in August the continued rain made necessary, and a "beautiful" breakfast of hot coffee, and a regular north-country rasher of bacon, and Mrs. Crosby's home-made bread and butter, all waiting on the table.

And Ted's mother took up her post again to watch for the reappearance of the tiny black speck, which was gradually to grow into her boy. It did not tarry. As soon as was possible it came in sight.

"How quick he has been — my dear, clever, good little Ted!" his mother said to herself. And you may be sure that she, and Cissy too, were both at the door to meet the little human water-rat, dripping, dripping all over, like "Johnny Head-in-air" in old "Struwelpeter," but with eyes as bright as any water-rat's, and cheeks rosy with cold and exercise and pleasure all mixed together, who, before he said a word, held out the precious letter.

"Here it is, mother — from father, just as you expected. I do hope it's got good news."

How could it bring other? Mother felt before she opened it that it could not contain any but good news, nor did it. Then she just gave her brave little boy one good kiss and one hearty "Thank you, Ted." For she did not want to spoil him by over-praise, or to take the bloom off what he evidently thought nothing out of the common, by exaggerating it.

And Ted enjoyed his breakfast uncommonly, I can assure you. He was only eleven and a half. I think our Ted showed that he had a sweet and brave spirit of his own; — don't you, children?

CHAPTER XI.

"IT'S ONLY I, MOTHER."

"How well my own heart knew
That voice so clear and true."

THE summer in the wolds, so long looked forward to, was over. It had been very happy, in spite of the rain having given the visitors at the Skensdale farm-house rather more of his company than they had bargained for, and it left many happy memories behind it.

And the coming home again was happy too. The days were beginning to "draw in" as people say, and "home," with its coal-fires — which, though not so picturesque, are ever so much *warmer* than wood ones, I assure you — its well-closing doors and shutters, its nice carpets and curtains, was after all a better place for chilly days and evenings than even the most interesting of farm-houses. And Ted had his school-work to think of too; he was anxious to take a very good place at the next examinations, for he was getting on for twelve, and "some day" he knew that he would have to go out into the world as it were, on his own account — to go away, that is to say, to a big boarding-school, as Percy had done before him.

He did work well, and he was rewarded, and this Christmas was a *very* happy one. There was plenty of skating, and Ted got on famously. Indeed, he learnt to be so clever at it, that Cissy used to feel quite proud, when people admired him for it, to think that he was her brother, though Ted himself took it quite simply. Skating was to him the greatest pleasure he knew. To feel oneself skimming along by one's own will, and yet with a power beyond oneself, was delightful past words.

"I do think," thought Ted to himself, one clear bright frosty day, when the sky was as blue, *almost*, as in summer, "I do think it's as nice as flying."

And then looking up, as he skimmed along, at the beautiful sky which winter or summer he loved so much, there came over him that same strange sweet *wonder* — the questioning he could not have put into words, as to whether the Heaven he often thought of in his dreamy childish way, was really up there, and what it was like, and what they did there. It must be happy and bright — happier and brighter even than down here, because *there*, in some way that Ted knew that neither he nor the wisest of mankind could explain, one would be nearer God. But yet it was difficult to understand how it could be much brighter and happier than this happy life down below. There was no good trying to understand, Ted decided. *God* understood, and that was enough. And as He had made us so happy here,

He might be trusted to know what was best for us there. Only — yes, that *was* the greatest puzzle of all, far more puzzling than anything else — *everybody* was not happy here — alas! no, Ted knew enough to know that — many, many were not happy; many, many were not good, and had never even had a chance of becoming so. Ah, that *was* a puzzle!

"When I'm a man," thought Ted — and it was a thought that came to him often — "I'll try to do something for those poor boys in London."

For nothing had made more impression on Ted, during his stay in London, than the sight of the so-called "City Arabs," and all he had heard about them. He had even written a story on the subject, taking for his hero a certain "Tom," whose adventures and misadventures were most thrilling; ending, for Ted liked stories that ended well, with his happy adoption into a kind-hearted family, such as it is to be wished there were more of to be found in real life! I should have liked to tell you this story, and some day perhaps I shall do so, but not, I fear, in this little book, for there are even a great many things about Ted himself which I shall not have room for.

There were other pleasures besides skating this Christmas time. Among these there was a very delightful entertainment given by some of Ted's father's and mother's friends to a very large party, both old and young. It was a regular Christmas

gathering — so large that the great big old-fashioned ball-room at the "Red Lion" was engaged for the purpose.

Dear me, what a great many scenes this old ball-room had witnessed! Election contests without end, during three-quarters of a century and more; balls of the old-world type, when the gentlemen had powdered wigs and ribbon-tied "queues," which, no doubt, you irreverent little people of the nineteenth century would call "pig-tails"; and my Lady Grizzle from the hall once actually stuck in the doorway, so ponderous was her head-gear, though by dint of good management her hoop and furbelows had been got through. And farther back still, in the Roundhead days, when — so ran the legend — a party of rollicking cavaliers, and a company commanded by one Captain Holdfast Armstrong, passed two succeeding nights in the Red Lion's ball-room, neither — so cleverly did the cautious landlord manage — having the least idea of the other's near neighbourhood.

But never had the old ball-room seen happier faces or heard merrier laughter than at this Christmas party; and among the happy faces none was brighter than our Ted's. He really did enjoy himself, though one of the youngest of the guests, for Cissy had been pronounced *too* young, but had reconciled herself to going to bed at her usual hour, by Ted's promise to tell her all about it the next day. And besides his boy friends — Percy, of course, who was home for

the holidays, and Rex, and several others — Ted had another companion this evening whom he was very fond of. This was a little girl about his own age, named Gertrude, the daughter of a friend of his father's. I have not told you about her before, because, I suppose, I have had so many things to tell, that I have felt rather puzzled how to put them all in nicely, especially as they are all simple, every-day things, with nothing the least wonderful or remarkable about them. Gertrude was a very dear little girl; she almost seemed to Ted like another kind of sister. He had Mabel, and Christine her sister, as big ones, and Cissy as his own particular little one, and Gertrude seemed to come in as a sort of companion sister, between the big ones and the little one. Ted was very rich in friends, you see, friends of all kinds. He used often to count them up and say so to himself.

Well, this evening of the big Christmas party was, as I said, one of the happiest he had ever known. All his friends were there — all looking as happy as happy could be.

"When I'm a man," thought Ted to himself, "I'd like to give parties like this every Christmas," and as he looked round the room his eyes gleamed with pleasure. Gertrude was standing beside him — they were going to be partners in a country-dance, which was a favourite of Ted's. Just then his mother came up to where they were standing.

"Ted, my boy," she said, "I am going home now. It is very late for you already — half past twelve. The others, however, are staying later, but I think it is quite time for you and me to be going, don't you?"

Ted's face clouded — a most unusual thing to happen.

"Gertrude isn't going yet," he said, "and Rex and his brothers; they're staying later. O mother, *must* I come now?"

His mother hesitated. She was always reluctant to disappoint the children if it could be helped, yet, on the other hand, she was even more anxious not to *spoil* them. But the sight of Ted's eager face carried the day.

"Ah well," she said, smiling, "I suppose I must be indulgent for once and go home without you. So good-night, Ted — you will come with the others — I hope it won't be *very* late."

As she turned away, it struck her that Ted's face did not look *altogether* delighted.

"Poor Ted," she said to herself, "he doesn't like to see me go away alone." But hoping he would enjoy himself, and that he would not be *too* tired "to-morrow morning," she went home without any misgiving, and she was not sorry to go. She found the Christmas holidays and all they entailed more fatiguing than did the children, for whom all these pleasant things "grew" without preparation.

It was a rather dark night — so thought Ted's mother to herself as she glanced out of her window for a moment before drawing the curtains close and going to bed — all the house was shut up, and all those who had stayed at home fast asleep by this time, and it had been arranged that the others should let themselves in with a latch-key. Ted's mother felt, therefore, rather surprised and a little startled when she heard a bell ring; at first she could hardly believe that she was not mistaken, and to be quite sure she opened the window and called out, "Is there any one there?" There was half a moment's silence, then some one came out a little from under the porch, where he had been standing since ringing the bell, and a well-known voice replied — how clearly and brightly its young tones rose up through the frosty air —

"It is only I, mother. I thought I'd rather come home after all."

"You, Ted," she replied; — "you, and alone?"

"Yes, mother. I thought somehow you'd like better to have me, so I just ran home."

"And weren't you frightened, Ted?" she said a little anxiously, but with a glad feeling at her heart; "weren't you afraid to come through the lonely streets, and the road, more lonely still, outside the town? For it is very dark, and everything shut up — weren't you afraid?"

"Oh no, mother — not a bit," he replied, "only

just when I had left all the houses I did walk a *little* faster, I think. But I'm so glad I came, if you're pleased, mother."

And when his mother had opened the door and let him in and given him a good-night kiss even more loving than usual, Ted went to bed and to sleep with a light happy heart, and his mother, as she too fell asleep, thanked God for her boy.

* * * * * * * *

I must now, I think, children, ask you to pass over with me nearly a whole year of Ted's life. These holidays ended, came, by slow degrees that year, the always welcome spring; then sunny summer again, a bright and happy summer this, though spent at my little friends' own home instead of at the Skensdale farm-house; then autumn with its shortening days and lengthening evenings, gradually shortening and lengthening into winter again; till at last Christmas itself, like the familiar figure of an old friend, whom, just turning the corner of the road where we live, we descry coming to visit us, was to be seen not so far off.

Many things had happened during this year, which, though all such simple things, I should like to tell you of but for the old restrictions of time and space. And indeed I have to thank you for having listened to me so long, for I blame myself a little for not having told you more plainly at the beginning that it was *not* a regular "story" I had to tell you

in the "carrots" coloured book this year, but just some parts, simple and real, of a child-life that I love to think of. And I would have liked to leave it here — for some reasons that is to say — or I would have liked to tell how Ted grew up into such a man as his boyhood promised — honest-hearted, loving, and unselfish, and as happy as a true Christmas child could not but be. But, dears, I *cannot* tell you this, for it was not to be so. Yet I am so anxious that the little book I have tried to write in such a way that his happy life and nature should be loved by other children — I am so anxious that the ending of this little book should not seem to you a *sad* one, at Christmas time too of all times, that I find it a little difficult to say what has to be said. For in the truest sense the close of my book is *not* sad. I will just tell it simply as it really was, trusting that you will know I love you all too well to wish to throw any cloud over your bright faces and thoughts.

Well, as I said, this year had brought many little events, some troubles of course, and much good, to our Ted. He had grown a good deal taller, and thinner too, and he never, even as a tiny toddler, could have been called fat! But he was well and strong, and had made good progress at school and good progress too in other ways. He was getting on famously at cricket and football, and was a first-rate croquet-player, for croquet was then in fashion. And the museum had not been neglected; it had

really grown into a very respectable and interesting museum, so that not only Ted's own people and near friends were pleased to see it, but even his parents' friends, and sometimes others, again, who happened to be visiting them, would ask the little collector to admit them. I really think it would be a good thing if more boys took to having museums; it would be a good thing for them, for nothing can be more amusing and interesting too, and a very good thing for their friends, especially in bad weather or in holiday-time, when now and then the hours hang heavily on these young people's hands, and one is inclined to wish that some fancy work for *boys* could be invented. Ted's museum had grown very much, and was always a great resource for him and for Cissy too, for, to tell the truth, her tastes were *rather* boyish.

His library had grown too. I cannot tell you how many nice books he had, and still less could I tell you how he treasured them. When, through much service, some of them grew weak in the back, he would, though reluctantly, consent to have them re-bound; and he had a pretty, and to my mind a touching, way of showing his affection for these old friends, which I never heard of in any other child. Before a book of his went to be bound he would carefully — tenderly I might almost say — cut off the old cover and lay it aside, and among the many sweet traces left by our boy — but I did not mean

to say that, only as it came naturally of itself I will leave it — few went more to his mother's heart than to find in one of his drawers the packet carefully tied up of his dear books' old coats.

Nothing gave Ted so much pleasure as a present of a book. This Christmas he had set his heart on one, and Christmas was really coming so near that he had begun to think of presents, and to write out, as was his habit, a list of all the people in the house, putting opposite the name of each the present he had reason to think would be most acceptable. The list ended in a modest-looking "self," and opposite "self" was written "a book." But all the other presents would have to be thought over and consulted about with mother — all except hers of course, which in its turn would have to be discussed with his father or Mabel perhaps — ever so many times, before it came to the actual buying.

One Sunday — it was about three weeks to Christmas by this time — the head master of Ted's school, who was also a clergyman, mentioned after the usual service that he wished to have a special thanksgiving service this year for the good health that had been enjoyed by the boys this "half." It had been almost exceptionally good, he said; and he himself, for one, and he was sure every one connected with the school would feel the same, *was* very thankful for it.

Ted's mother and Mabel, who were both, as it

happened, at the school chapel service that afternoon, glanced at their boy when this announcement was made. They knew well that, despite his merry heart, Ted was sensitive to things that do not affect all children, and they were not surprised to see his cheeks grow a little paler. There was something in the thought of this solemn thanksgiving, in which he was to take part, that gave him a little of the same feeling as he had had long ago in the grand old church, when he looked up to the lofty roof, shrouded in a mystery of dim light his childish eyes could not pierce, and the sudden carillon broke out as if sung by the angels in heaven.

And a little chill struck to his mother's heart; she knew the service was a good and fitting acknowledgment of God's care, and yet a strange feeling went through her, for which she blamed herself, almost like that of the poor Irishwomen, who, when any one remarks on the beauty and healthiness of their children, hasten to cross themselves and to murmur softly "In a good hour be it spoken." For human nature, above all *mother* nature, is the same all the world over!

But on their way home she and Mabel talked it over, and decided that it was better to say nothing about it to Ted.

"It would only deepen the impression and *make* him nervous," said Mabel wisely.

A day or two later — a damp, rainy day it had

been, there were a good many such about this time — Ted's mother, entering the drawing-room in the evening, heard some one softly singing to himself, gently touching the piano at the same time. It was already dusk, and she went in very quietly. The little musician did not hear her, and she sat down in silence for a moment to listen, for it was Ted, and the song in his sweet, clear tones — tones with a strange touch of sadness in them like the church bells, — was "Home, sweet home."

It brought the tears to her eyes.

"Ted," she said at last.

"O mother," he said, "I didn't know you were there."

"But you don't mind *me*," she said.

Ted hesitated.

"I don't know how it is, mother," he said, frankly. "It isn't as if I *could* sing, you know. But I can't even try to do it when anybody's there. Is it silly, mother?"

"It's very natural," she said, kindly. "But if it gives me pleasure to hear you?"

"Yes," he said, gently.

"And when you're a man I hope and think you may have a nice voice."

"Yes," he said again, rather absently.

Something in his tone struck his mother; it sounded *tired*.

"You're quite well, Ted, aren't you?" she said.

"Oh yes, mother — just a very little tired. It's been such a rainy day; it isn't like Christmas coming so soon, is it? There's no snow and no skating."

"No, dear."

"There was no snow the Christmas I was born, was there, mother?"

"No, dear," said his mother again.

Ted gave a little sigh.

"You're going to Rex's to-night; it is his party, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, "but I don't seem to care much to go."

"But you're quite well, I think," said his mother cheerfully. "It would be unkind not to go when they are all expecting you."

"Yes," said Ted. "It would be."

So he went off to get ready; and his mother felt pleased, thinking the dull weather had, for a wonder, affected his spirits, and that the merry evening with his friends would do him good.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHITE CROSS.

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be,
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere.
The lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fade and die that night
It was the plant and flower of light;
In small proportion we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be."

Early Ripe. — BEN JONSON.

IT seemed as if she had been right. Ted came home with bright eyes and glowing cheeks, and said they had had an "awfully" merry evening. And his mother went to bed with an easy mind.

But the next morning she felt less happy again, for Ted was evidently not well. He was not very ill, but just not very well, and he hung about in an uninterested, unsettled way, quite unlike his usual busy briskness.

"He excites himself too much when he goes out, I think," said his father; "we really shall have to leave off ever letting him go out in the evening unless we are there ourselves;" and he looked a

little anxiously at Ted as he spoke, though the boy had not heard what he said.

But again this slight anxiety passed by. Then came a change in the weather, and a sudden frost set in. Ted seemed to revive at once, and when he heard that there was to be a whole holiday for skating, no one was more eager about it than he. And, a little against her own feelings, his mother let him go.

"You must be careful, Ted," she said; "you are not yet looking as well as usual. And the ice cannot be very firm. Indeed, I almost doubt its bearing at all. A bath in icy water would not do you any good just now."

But Ted promised to be careful, and his mother knew she could trust him. Besides, several big boys were to be there, who would, she knew, look after him. So Ted went, and came home saying it had been as usual "awfully jolly"; but he did look tired, and owned himself rather so, even though well enough to go out again in the evening with the others, and to be one of the merriest at what the children called "a penny reading" together, at which each in turn of the little party of friends read or repeated or acted some story or piece of poetry for the amusement of the others. And once again, but this was the last time she could do so, Ted's mother felt able to throw off the slight vague anxiety which had kept coming and going for the

last few days about her little boy, and to go to sleep with an easy mind.

But the next morning, to his own and her disappointment, he woke "tired" again. Only tired — he complained of nothing else, but he said he wished he need not go to school. And that was *so* unlike Ted.

"Need I go, mother?" he asked gently.

She looked at him doubtfully.

"It seems such a pity, dear — so near the examinations too. And sometimes, you know, when you haven't felt quite well in the morning you have come back quite right again."

"Very well," said Ted, and he went off cheerfully enough.

But when he came back he was not all right as his mother had hoped; the "tiredness" was greater, and he seemed to have caught cold, and the next morning, after a restless night, there was no longer any doubt that Ted was ill. Our dear little Ted — how quickly illness does its work — above all with children! Almost before one has realised its presence the rosy cheeks are pale and the bright eyes dimmed; the sturdy legs grow weak and trembling, and the merry chatter ceases. Ah dear! what a sad, strange hush comes over a house where "one of the children" is ill.

The hush and the sadness came but gradually. Still, for a day or two, they hoped it was nothing

very serious. On this first afternoon of Ted's really owning himself ill, two girl friends of Mabel's came, as had been arranged, to see the famous museum, usually such a pleasure to its owner to exhibit. But already how different all seemed!

"Mother, dear," he said, as if half reproaching himself for selfishness, "it sometimes almost seems a bother to have to show my museum;" but as it was considered better not to let him yield to the depression coming over him, he bravely roused himself and went through the little exhibition with his usual gentle courtesy. But this was the last effort of the kind possible for him.

Sunday and Monday found him weaker, and the doctor's kind face grew graver. Still he was not *very* ill; only it began to seem as if he had not strength to resist what had not, at first, threatened seriously. And one day he made his mother's heart seem, for an instant, to stop beating, when, looking up wistfully, he said to her,

"Mother, I don't *think* I shall ever get better."

And the sad days and sadder nights went slowly on. Now and then there seemed a little sparkle of hope. Once Ted began to talk about meeting his dear Percy at the station, when he came home for the holidays, which made those about him hope he was feeling stronger; then, at another time, he said what a pity it would be not to be well by Christmas and by his birthday, and he smiled when his father

told him, as was the case, that the doctor quite hoped he would be well by then; and one day when the post brought him his great wish — a beautiful book of travels — his face lighted up with pleasure, and, though not able to read it, the welcome present lay on his bed where he could see it and smile to himself to think it was there. There were happy times through his illness, weak and wearied though he grew, and now and then he seemed so bright that it was difficult, for a little, not to think him much better. But the illness which Ted had is a very deceitful one — it invisibly saps away the strength even when the worst sharp suffering is over — and slowly, slowly it came to be seen that his own feeling had been true; our Ted was not to get better.

One day a travelling merchant brought to the door a case of pretty Parian ornaments. White and pure they shone in the winter sunshine, and some one had the thought that "one of these might please Ted." So they were brought up for him to choose from. Poor Cissy! she would fain have carried them in; but alas! for fear of infection, she could not be allowed to see her brother, which made of these last days a double sorrow to her, though she did not know how ill he was. Ted touched the pretty things with his little thin hand.

"They are very pretty," he said. "I like this one best, please, mother."

"This one" was a snow-white cross, and his

mother's heart ached with a strange thrill as she saw his choice; but she smiled as she placed it beside him, where it stood, ever in his sight, till his blue eyes could see it no more.

There came a morning on which the winter sun rose with a wonderful glory; gold and orange light seemed to fill the sky, as if in prelude to some splendid pageant. It was Sunday morning. Ted lay asleep, as if carved in marble, his little white face rested on the pillow, and as his mother turned from the marvellous beauty outside to the small figure that seemed to her, just then, the one thing in earth or sky, she whispered to herself what she felt to be the truth.

"It is his last Sunday with us. Before another my Ted will have entered that city where there is no need of the sun, of which God Himself is the light. My happy Ted! but oh, how shall we live without him?"

She was right. Ted did not live to see Christmas or his birthday. Sweetly and peacefully, trusting God in death as he had trusted Him in life, the little fellow fearlessly entered the dark valley — the valley of the *shadow* of death only, for who can doubt that to such as Ted what *seems* death is but the entrance to fuller life?

So, children, I will not say that this was the *end* of the simple life I have told you of — and in yet another way Ted lives — in the hearts of all that loved him

his sweet memory can never die. And if I have been able to make any among you feel that you too love him, I cannot tell you how glad I shall be.

They laid him in a pretty corner of the little cemetery from which can be seen the old church Ted loved so well, and the beautiful chase, where he so often walked. And even in those midwinter days his little friend Gertrude found flowers for his grave. It was all she could do to show her love for him, she said, crying bitterly, for she might not see him to bid him good-bye, and her heart was very sore.

So it was with Christmas roses that the grave of our Christmas child was decked.

THE END.

OUR CONSULTATION TOOK A GOOD WHILE. —C. iii. p. 44.

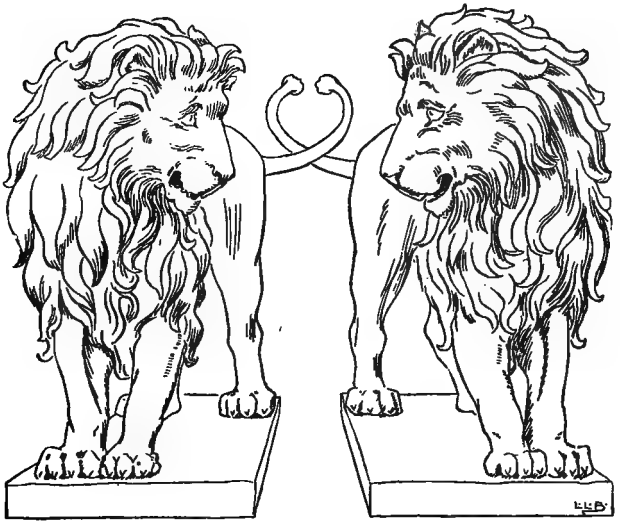
—*Frontispiece.*

THE CARVED LIONS

BY

MRS·MOLESWORTH

ILLVSTRATED·BY·L·LESLIE·BROOKE



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1910

THE CARVED LIONS

CHAPTER I.

OLD DAYS.

It is already a long time since I was a little girl. Sometimes, when I look out upon the world and see how many changes have come about, how different many things are from what I can remember them, I could believe that a still longer time had passed since my childhood than is really the case. Sometimes, on the contrary, the remembrance of things that then happened comes over me so very vividly, so very *real*-ly, that I can scarcely believe myself to be as old as I am.

I can remember things in my little girlhood more clearly than many in later years. This makes me hope that the story of some part of it may interest children of to-day, for I know I have not forgotten the feelings I had as a child. And after all, I believe that in a great many ways children are very

like each other in their hearts and minds, even though their lives may seem very different and very far apart.

The first years of my childhood were very happy, though there were some things in my life which many children would not like at all. My parents were not rich, and the place where we lived was not pretty or pleasant. It was a rather large town in an ugly part of the country, where great tall chimneys giving out black smoke, and streams — once clear sparkling brooks, no doubt — whose water was nearly as black as the smoke, made it often difficult to believe in bright blue sky or green grass, or any of the sweet pure country scenes that children love, though perhaps children that have them do not love them as much as those who have not got them do.

I think that was the way with me. The country was almost the same as fairyland to me — the peeps I had of it now and then were a delight I could not find words to express.

But what matters most to children is not *where* their home is, but *what* it is. And our home was a very sweet and loving one, though it was only a rather small and dull house in a dull street. Our

father and mother did everything they possibly could to make us happy, and the trial of living at Great Mexington must have been far worse for them than for us. For they had both been accustomed to rich homes when they were young, and father had never expected that he would have to work so hard or in the sort of way he had to do, after he lost nearly all his money.

When I say "us," I mean my brother Haddie and I. Haddie — whose real name was Haddon — was two years older than I, and we two were the whole family. My name — *was* I was going to say, for now there are so few people to call me by my Christian name that it seems hardly mine — my name is Geraldine. Somehow I never had a "short" for it, though it is a long name, and Haddie was always Haddie, and "Haddon" scarcely needs shortening. I think it was because he nearly always called me Sister or "Sis."

Haddie was between ten and eleven years old and I was nine when the great change that I am going to tell you about came over our lives. But I must go back a little farther than that, otherwise you would not understand all about us, nor the meaning of the odd title I have chosen for my story.

I had no governess and I did not go to school. My mother taught me herself, partly, I think, to save expense, and partly because she did not like the idea of sending me to even a day-school at Great Mexington. For though many of the families there were very rich, and had large houses and carriages and horses and beautiful gardens, they were not always very refined. There were good and kind and unselfish people there as there are everywhere, but there were some who thought more of being rich than of anything else — the sort of people that are called "purse proud." And as children very often take after their parents, my father and mother did not like the idea of my having such children as my companions — children who would look down upon me for being poor, and perhaps treat me unkindly on that account.

"When Geraldine is older she must go to school," my father used to say, "unless by that time our ship comes in and we can afford a governess. But when she is older it will not matter so much, as she will have learnt to value things at their just worth."

I did not then understand what he meant, but I have never forgotten the words.

I was a very simple child. It never entered my head that there was anything to be ashamed of in living in a small house and having only two servants. I thought it would be *nice* to have more money, so that mamma would not need to be so busy and could have more pretty dresses, and above all that we could then live in the country, but I never minded being poor in any sore or ashamed way. And I often envied Haddie, who did go to school. I thought it would be nice to have lots of other little girls to play with. I remember once saying so to mamma, but she shook her head.

"I don't think you would like it as much as you fancy you would," she said. "Not at present at least. When you are a few years older I hope to send you for some classes to Miss Ledbury's school, and by that time you will enjoy the good teaching. But except for the lessons, I am quite sure it is better and happier for you to be at home, even though you find it rather lonely sometimes."

And in his way Haddie said much the same. School was all very well for boys, he told me. If a fellow tried to bully you, you could bully him back. But girls weren't like that — they couldn't

fight it out. And when I said to him I didn't want to fight, he still shook his head, and repeated that I wouldn't like school at all — some of his friends' sisters were at school and they hated it.

Still, though I did not often speak of it, the wish to go to school, and the belief that I should find school-life very happy and interesting, remained in my mind. I often made up fancies about it, and pictured myself doing lessons with other little girls and reading the same story-books and playing duets together. I could not believe that I should not like it. The truth was, I suppose, that I was longing for companions of my own age.

It was since Haddie went to school that I had felt lonely. I was a great deal with mamma, but of course there were hours in the day when she was taken up with other things and could not attend to me. I used to long then for the holidays to come so that I should have Haddie again to play with.

My happiest days were Wednesdays and Saturdays, for then he did not go to school in the afternoon. And mamma very often planned some little treat for us on those days, such as staying up to have late tea with her and papa when he came in from his office, or reading aloud some new story-

book, or going a walk with her in the afternoon and buying whatever we liked for our own tea at the confectioner's.

Very simple treats — but then we were very simple children, as I have said already.

Our house, though in a street quite filled with houses, was some little way from the centre of the town, where the best shops were — some years before, our street had, I suppose, been considered quite in the country. We were very fond of going to the shops with mamma. We thought them very grand and beautiful, though they were not nearly as pretty as shops are nowadays, for they were much smaller and darker, so that the things could not be spread out in the attractive way they are now, nor were the things themselves nearly as varied and tempting.

There was one shop which interested us very much. It belonged to the principal furniture-maker of Mexington. It scarcely looked like a shop, but was more like a rather gloomy private house very full of heavy dark cabinets and tables and wardrobes and chairs, mostly of mahogany, and all extremely good and well made. Yes, furniture, though ugly, really was very good in those days

— I have one or two relics of my old home still, in the shape of a leather-covered armchair and a beautifully-made chest of drawers. For mamma's godmother had helped to furnish our house when we came to Mexington, and she was the sort of old lady who when she *did* give a present gave it really good of its kind. She had had furniture herself made by Cranston — that was the cabinet-maker's name — for her home was in the country only about three hours' journey from Mexington — and it had been first-rate, so she ordered what she gave mamma from him also.

But it was not because the furniture was so good that we liked going to Cranston's. It was for quite another reason. A little way in from the front entrance to the shop, where there were glass doors to swing open, stood a pair of huge lions carved in very dark, almost black, wood. They were nearly, if not quite, as large as life, and the first time I saw them, when I was only four or five, I was really frightened of them. They guarded the entrance to the inner part of the shop, which was dark and gloomy and mysterious-looking, and I remember clutching fast hold of mamma's hand as we passed them, not feeling at all sure that they

would not suddenly spring forward and catch us. But when mamma saw that I was frightened, she stopped and made me feel the lions and stroke them to show me that they were only wooden and could not possibly hurt me. And after that I grew very fond of them, and was always asking her to take me to the "lion shop."

Haddie liked them too — his great wish was to climb on one of their backs and play at going a ride.

I don't think I thought of that. What I liked was to stroke their heavy manes and fancy to myself what I would do if, all of a sudden, one of them "came alive," as I called it, and turned his head round and looked at me. And as I grew older, almost without knowing it, I made up all sorts of fairy fancies about the lions — I sometimes thought they were enchanted princes, sometimes that they were real lions who were only carved wood in the day-time, and at night walked about wherever they liked.

So, for one reason or another, both Haddie and I were always very pleased when mamma had to look in at Cranston's.

This happened oftener than might have been expected, considering that our house was small,

and that my father and mother were not rich enough often to buy new furniture. For mamma's godmother seemed to be always ordering something or other at the cabinet-maker's, and as she knew mamma was very sensible and careful, she used to write to her to explain to Cranston about the things she wanted, or to look at them before he sent them home, to see that they were all right. And Cranston was always very polite indeed to mamma.

He himself was a stout, red-faced, little, elderly man, with gray whiskers, which he brushed up in a fierce kind of way that made him look like a rather angry cat, though he really was a very gentle and kind old man. I thought him much nicer than his partner, whose name was Berridge, a tall, thin man, who talked very fast, and made a great show of scolding any of the clerks or workmen who happened to be about.

Mr. Cranston was very proud of the lions. They had belonged to his grandfather and then to his father, who had both been in the same sort of business as he was, and he told mamma they had been carved in "the East." I didn't know what he meant by the East, and I don't now know what

country he was alluding to — India or China or Japan. And I am not sure that he knew himself. But "the East" sounded far away and mysterious — it might do for fairyland or brownieland, and I was quite satisfied. No doubt, wherever they came from, the lions were very beautifully carved.

Now I will go on to tell about the changes that came into our lives, closing the doors of these first happy childish years, when there scarcely seemed to be ever a cloud on our sky.

One day, when I was a month or two past nine years old, mamma said to me just as I was finishing my practising — I used to practise half an hour every other day, and have a music lesson from mamma the between days — that she was going out to do some shopping that afternoon, and that, if I liked, I might go with her.

"I hope it will not rain," she added, "though it does look rather threatening. But perhaps it will hold off till evening."

"And I can take my umbrella in case it rains," I said. I was very proud of my umbrella. It had been one of my last birthday presents. "Yes, mamma, I should like to come very much. Will Haddie come too?"

For it was Wednesday — one of his half-holidays.

"To tell the truth," said mamma, "I forgot to ask him this morning if he would like to come, but he will be home soon — it is nearly luncheon time. I daresay he will like to come, especially as I have to go to Cranston's."

She smiled a little as she said this. Our love for the carved lions amused her.

"Oh yes, I am sure he will like to come," I said. "And may we buy something for tea at Miss Fryer's on our way home?"

Mamma smiled again.

"That will be two treats instead of one," she said, "but I daresay I can afford two or three pence."

Miss Fryer was our own pet confectioner, or pastry-cook, as we used to say more frequently then. She was a Quakeress, and her shop was very near our house, so near that mamma let me go there alone with Haddie. Miss Fryer was very grave and quiet, but we were not at all afraid of her, for we knew that she was really very kind. She was always dressed in pale gray or fawn colour, with a white muslin shawl crossed over her shoulders, and a white net cap beautifully quilled and fitting tightly round her face, so that only a very little of her soft gray hair

showed. She always spoke to us as "thou" and "thee," and she was very particular to give us exactly what we asked for, and also to take the exact money in payment. But now and then, after the business part had been all correctly settled, she would choose out a nice bun or sponge-cake, or two or three biscuits, and would say "I give thee this as a present." And she did not like us to say, "Thank you, Miss Fryer," but "Thank you, friend Susan." I daresay she would have liked us to say, "Thank *thee*," but neither Haddie nor I had courage for that!

I ran upstairs in high spirits, and five minutes after when Haddie came in from school he was nearly as pleased as I to hear our plans.

"If only it does not rain," said mamma at luncheon.

Luncheon was, of course, our dinner, and it was often mamma's dinner really too. Our father was sometimes so late of getting home that he liked better to have tea than a regular dinner. But mamma always called it luncheon because it seemed natural to her.

"I don't mind if it does rain," said Haddie, "because of my new mackintosh."

Haddie was very proud of his mackintosh, which

father had got him for going to and from school in rainy weather. Mackintoshes were then a new invention, and very expensive compared with what they are now. But Haddie was rather given to catching cold, and at Great Mexington it did rain very often — much oftener than anywhere else, I am quite sure.

"And Geraldine doesn't mind because of her new umbrella," said mamma. "So we are proof against the weather, whatever happens."

It may seem strange that I can remember so much of a time now so very long ago. But I really do — of that day and of those that followed it especially, because, as I have already said, they were almost the close of the first part of our childish life.

That afternoon was such a happy one. We set off with mamma, one on each side of her, hanging on her arms, Haddie trying to keep step with her, and I skipping along on my tiptoes. When we got to the more crowded streets we had to separate — that is to say, Haddie had to let go of mamma's arm, so that he could fall behind when we met more than one person. For the pavements at Mexington were in some parts narrow and old-fashioned.

Mamma had several messages to do, and at some

of the shops Haddie and I waited outside because we did not think they were very interesting. But at some we were only too ready to go in. One I remember very well. It was a large grocer's. We thought it a most beautiful shop, though nowadays it would be considered quite dull and gloomy, compared with the brilliant places of the kind you see filled with biscuits and dried fruits and all kinds of groceries tied up with ribbons, or displayed in boxes of every colour of the rainbow. I must say I think the groceries themselves were quite as good as they are now, and in some cases better, but that may be partly my fancy, as I daresay I have a partiality for old-fashioned things.

Mamma did not buy all our groceries at this grand shop, for it was considered dear. But certain things, such as tea — which cost five shillings a pound then — she always ordered there. And the grocer, like Cranston, was a very polite man. I think he understood that though she was not rich, and never bought a great deal, mamma was different in herself from the grandly-dressed Mexington ladies who drove up to his shop in their carriages, with a long list of all the things they wanted. And when mamma had finished giving her order, he

used always to offer Haddie and me a gingerbread biscuit of a very particular and delicious kind. They were large round biscuits, of a nice bright brown colour, and underneath they had thin white wafer, which we called "eating paper." They were crisp without being hard. I never see gingerbreads like them now.

"This is a lucky day, mamma," I said, when we came out of the grocer's. "Mr. Simeon never forgets to give us gingerbreads when he is there himself."

"No," said mamma, "he is a very kind man. Perhaps he has got Haddies and Geraldines of his own, and knows what they like."

"And now are we going to Cranston's?" asked my brother.

Mamma looked at the paper in her hand. She was very careful and methodical in all her ways, and always wrote down what she had to do before she came out.

"Yes," she said, "I think I have done everything else. But I shall be some little time at Cranston's. Mrs. Selwood has asked me to settle ever so many things with him — she is going abroad for the winter, and wants him to do a good deal of work at Fernley while she is away."

CHAPTER II.

A HAPPY EVENING.

HADDIE and I were not at all sorry to hear that mamma's call at Cranston's was not to be a hurried one.

"We don't mind if you are ever so long," I said; "do we, Haddie?"

"No, of course we don't," Haddie agreed. "I should like to spend a whole day in those big show-rooms of his. Couldn't we have jolly games of hide-and-seek, Sis? And then riding the lions! I wish you were rich enough to buy one of the lions, mamma, and have it for an ornament in the hall, or in the drawing-room."

"We should need to build a hall or a drawing-room to hold it," said mamma, laughing. "I'm afraid your lion would turn into a white elephant, Haddie, if it became ours."

I remember wondering what she meant. How could a lion turn into an elephant? But I was

rather a slow child in some ways. Very often I thought a thing over a long time in my mind if I did not understand it before asking any one to explain it. And so before I said anything it went out of my head, for here we were at Cranston's door.

There was only a young shopman to be seen, but when mamma told him she particularly wanted to see Mr. Cranston himself, he asked us to step in and take a seat while he went to fetch him.

We passed between the lions. It seemed quite a long time since we had seen them, and I thought they looked at us very kindly. I was just nudging Haddie to whisper this to him when mamma stopped to say to us that we might stay in the outer room if we liked; she knew it was our favourite place, and in a few minutes we heard her talking to old Mr. Cranston, who had come to her in the inner showroom through another door.

Haddie's head was full of climbing up onto one of the lions to go a ride. But luckily he could not find anything to climb up with, which was a very good thing, as he would have been pretty sure to topple over, and Mr. Cranston would not have been at all pleased if he had scratched the lion.

To keep him quiet I began talking to him about

my fancies. I made him look close into the lions' faces — it was getting late in the afternoon, and we had noticed before we came in that the sun was setting stormily. A ray of bright orange-coloured light found its way in through one of the high-up windows which were at the back of the show-room, and fell right across the mane of one of the lions and almost into the eyes of the other. The effect on the dark, almost black, wood of which they were made was very curious.

"Look, Haddie," I said suddenly, catching his arm, "doesn't it really look as if they were smiling at us — the one with the light on its face especially? I really do think there's something funny about them — I wonder if they are enchanted."

Haddie did not laugh at me. I think in his heart he was fond of fancies too, though he might not have liked the boys at school to know it. He sat staring at our queer friends nearly as earnestly as I did myself. And as the ray of light slowly faded, he turned to me.

"Yes," he said, "their faces do seem to change. But I think they always look kind."

"They do to *us*," I said confidently, "but sometimes they are quite fierce. I don't think they

looked at us the way they do now the first time they saw us. And one day one of the men in the shop shoved something against one of them and his face frowned — I'm sure it did."

"I wonder if he'd frown if I got up on his back," said Haddie.

"Oh, do leave off about climbing on their backs," I said. "It wouldn't be at all comfortable — they're so broad, you couldn't sit cross-legs, and they'd be as slippery as anything. It's much nicer to make up stories about them coming alive in the night, or turning into black princes and saying magic words to make the doors open like in the Arabian Nights."

"Well, tell me stories of all they do then," said Haddie condescendingly.

"I will if you'll let me think for a minute," I said. "I wish Aunty Etta was here — she does know such lovely stories."

"I like yours quite as well," said Haddie encouragingly, "I don't remember Aunty Etta's; it's such a long time since I saw her. You saw her last year, you know, but I didn't."

"She told me one about a china parrot, a most beautiful green and gold parrot, that was really a

fairy," I said. "I think I could turn it into a lion story, if I thought about it."

"No," said Haddie, "you can tell the parrot one another time. I'd rather hear one of your own stories, new, about the lions. I know you've got some in your head. Begin, do — I'll help you if you can't get on."

But my story that afternoon was not to be heard. Just as I was beginning with, "Well, then, there was once an old witch who lived in a very lonely hut in the middle of a great forest," there came voices behind us, and in another moment we heard mamma saying,

"Haddie, my boy, Geraldine, I am quite ready."

I was not very sorry. I liked to have more time to make up my stories, and Haddie sometimes hurried me so. It was Aunty Etta, I think, who had first put it into my head to make them. She was *so* clever about it herself, both in making stories and in remembering those she had read, and she *had* read a lot. But she was away in India at the time I am now writing about; her going so far off was a great sorrow to mamma.

Haddie and I started up at once. We had to be very obedient, what father called "quickly obedient," and though he was so kind he was very strict too.

"My children are great admirers of your lions, Mr. Cranston," mamma said; and the old man smiled.

"They are not singular in their taste, madam," he said. "I own that I am very proud of them myself, and when my poor daughter was a child there was nothing pleased her so much as when her mother or I lifted her on to one of them, and made believe she was going a ride."

Haddie looked triumphant.

"There now you see, Sis," he whispered, nudging me.

But I did not answer him, for I was listening to what mamma was saying.

"Oh, by the bye, Mr. Cranston," she went on, "I was forgetting to ask how your little grandchild is. Have you seen her lately?"

Old Cranston's face brightened.

"She is very well, madam, I thank you," he replied. "And I am pleased to say that she is coming to stay with us shortly. We hope to keep her through the winter. Her stepmother is very kind, but with little children of her own, it is not always easy for her to give as much attention as she would like to Myra, and she and Mr. Raby have responded cordially to our invitation."

"I am very glad to hear it — very glad indeed," said mamma. "I know what a pleasure it will be to you and Mrs. Cranston. Let me see — how old is the little girl now — seven, eight?"

"*Nine*, madam, getting on for ten indeed," said Mr. Cranston with pride.

"Dear me," said mamma, "how time passes! I remember seeing her when she was a baby — before we came to live here, of course, once when I was staying at Fernley, just after ——"

Mamma stopped and hesitated.

"Just after her poor mother died — yes, madam," said the old man quietly.

And then we left, Mr. Cranston respectfully holding the door open.

It was growing quite dark; the street-lamps were lighted and their gleam was reflected on the pavement, for it had been raining and was still quite wet underfoot. Mamma looked round her.

"You had better put on your mackintosh, Haddie," she said. "It may rain again. No, Geraldine dear, there is no use opening your umbrella till it does rain."

My feelings were divided between pride in my umbrella and some reluctance to have it wet! I

took hold of mamma's arm again, while Haddie walked at her other side. It was not a very cheerful prospect before us — the gloomy dirty streets of Mexington were now muddy and sloppy as well — though on the whole I don't know but that they looked rather more cheerful by gaslight than in the day. It was chilly too, for the season was now very late autumn, if not winter. But little did we care — I don't think there could have been found anywhere two happier children than my brother and I that dull rainy evening as we trotted along beside our mother. There was the feeling of *her* to take care of us, of our cheerful home waiting for us, with a bright fire and the tea-table all spread. If I had not been a little tired — for we had walked a good way — in my heart I was just as ready to skip along on the tips of my toes as when we first came out.

"We may stop at Miss Fryer's, mayn't we, mamma?" said Haddie.

"Well, yes, I suppose I promised you something for tea," mamma replied.

"How much may we spend?" he asked. "Sixpence — do say sixpence, and then we can get enough for you to have tea with us too."

"Haddie," I said reproachfully, "as if we wouldn't give mamma something however little we had!"

"We'd offer it her of course, but you know she wouldn't take it," he replied. "So it's much better to have really enough for all."

His way of speaking made mamma laugh again.

"Then I suppose it must be sixpence," she said, "and here we are at Miss Fryer's. Shall we walk on, my little girl, I think you must be tired, and let Haddie invest in cakes and run after us?"

"Oh no, please mamma, dear," I said, "I like so to choose too."

Half the pleasure of the sixpence would have been gone if Haddie and I had not spent it together.

"Then I will go on," said mamma, "and you two can come after me together."

She took out her purse and gave my brother the promised money, and then with a smile on her dear face — I can see her now as she stood in the light of the street-lamp just at the old Quakeress's door — she nodded to us and turned to go.

I remember exactly what we bought, partly, perhaps, because it was our usual choice. We used to think it over a good deal first and each would

suggest something different, but in the end we nearly always came back to the old plan for the outlay of our sixpence, namely, half-penny crumpets for threepence — that meant *seven*, not six; it was the received custom to give seven for threepence — and half-penny Bath buns for the other threepence — seven of them too, of course. And *Bath* buns, not plain ones. You cannot get these now — not at least in any place where I have lived of late years. And I am not sure but that even at Mexington they were a *spécialité* of dear old Miss Fryer's. They were so good; indeed, everything she sold was thoroughly good of its kind. She was so honest, using the best materials for all she made.

That evening she stood with her usual gentle gravity while we discussed what we should have, and when after discarding sponge-cakes and finger-biscuits, which we had thought of "for a change," and partly because finger-biscuits weighed light and made a good show, we came round at last to the seven crumpets and seven buns, she listened as seriously and put them up in their little paper bags with as much interest as though the ceremony had never been gone through before. And then just as we were turning to leave, she lifted up a glass shade

and drew out two cheese-cakes, which she proceeded to put into another paper bag.

Haddie and I looked at each other. This was a lovely present. What a tea we should have!

"I think thee will find these good," she said with a smile, "and I hope thy dear mother will not think them too rich for thee and thy brother."

She put them into my hand, and of course we thanked her heartily. I have often wondered why she never said, "thou wilt," but always "thee will," for she was not an uneducated woman by any means.

Laden with our treasures Haddie and I hurried home. There was mamma watching for us with the door open. How sweet it was to have her always to welcome us!

"Tea is quite ready, dears," she said. "Run upstairs quickly, Geraldine, and take off your things, they must be rather damp. I am going to have my real tea with you, for I have just had a note from your father to say he won't be in till late and I am not to wait for him."

Mamma sighed a little as she spoke. I felt sorry for her disappointment, but, selfishly speaking, we sometimes rather enjoyed the evenings father was late, for then mamma gave us her whole attention,

as she was not able to do when he was at home. And though we were very fond of our father, we were — I especially, I think — much more afraid of him than of our mother.

And that was such a happy evening! I have never forgotten it. Mamma was so good and thoughtful for us, she did not let us find out in the least that she was feeling anxious on account of something father had said in his note to her. She was just perfectly sweet.

We were very proud of our spoils from Miss Fryer's. We wanted mamma to have one cheese-cake and Haddie and I to divide the other between us. But mamma would not agree to that. She would only take a half, so that we had three-quarters each.

"Wasn't it kind of Miss Fryer, mamma?" I said.

"Very kind," said mamma. "I think she is really fond of children though she is so grave. She has not forgotten what it was to be a child herself."

Somehow her words brought back to my mind what old Mr. Cranston had said about his little grand-daughter.

"I suppose children *are* all rather like each other," I said. "Like about Haddie, and that little girl riding on the lions."

Haddie was not very pleased at my speaking of it; he was beginning to be afraid of seeming babyish.

"That was *quite* different," he said. "She was a baby and had to be held on. It was the fun of climbing up *I* cared for."

"She wasn't a baby," I said. "She's nine years old, he said she was — didn't he, mamma?"

"You are mixing two things together," said mamma. "Mr. Cranston was speaking first of his daughter long ago when she was a child, and then he was speaking of *her* daughter, little Myra Raby, who is now nine years old."

"Why did he say my 'poor' daughter?" I asked.

"Did you not hear the allusion to her death? Mrs. Raby died soon after little Myra was born. Mr. Raby married again — he is a clergyman not very far from Fernley ——"

"A clergyman," exclaimed Haddie. He was more worldly-wise than I, thanks to being at school. "A clergyman, and he married a shopkeeper's daughter."

"There are very different kinds of shopkeepers, Haddie," said mamma. "Mr. Cranston is very rich, and his daughter was very well educated and very nice. Still, no doubt Mr. Raby was in a higher

position than she, and both Mr. Cranston and his wife are very right-minded people, and never pretend to be more than they are. That is why I was so glad to hear that little Myra is coming to stay with them. I was afraid the second Mrs. Raby might have looked down upon them perhaps."

Haddie said no more about it. And though I listened to what mamma said, I don't think I quite took in the sense of it till a good while afterwards. It has often been like that with me in life. I have a curiously "retentive" memory, as it is called. Words and speeches remain in my mind like unread letters, till some day, quite unexpectedly, something reminds me of them, and I take them out, as it were, and find what they really meant.

But just now my only interest in little Myra Raby's history was a present one.

"Mamma," I said suddenly, "if she is a nice little girl like what her mamma was, mightn't I have her to come and see me and play with me? I have never had any little girl to play with, and it is so dull sometimes — the days that Haddie is late at school and when you are busy. Do say I may have her — I'm sure old Mr. Cranston would let her come, and then I might go and play with her some-

times perhaps. Do you think she will play among the furniture — where the lions are?"

Mamma shook her head.

"No, dear," she answered. "I am quite sure her grandmother would not like that. For you see anybody might come into the shop or show-rooms, and it would not seem nice for a little girl to be playing there — not nice for a carefully brought-up little girl, I mean."

"Then I don't think I should care to go to her house," I said, "but I would like her to come here. Please let her, mamma dear."

But mamma only said,

"We shall see."

After tea she told us stories — some of them we had heard often before, but we never tired of hearing them again — about when she and Aunty Etta were little girls. They were lovely stories — real ones of course. Mamma was not as clever as Aunty Etta about making up fairy ones.

We were quite sorry when it was time to go to bed.

After I had been asleep for a little that night I woke up again — I had not been very sound asleep. Just then I saw a light, and mamma came into the room with a candle.

"I'm not asleep, dear mamma," I said. "Do kiss me again."

"That is what I have come for," she answered.

And she came up to the bedside and kissed me, oh so sweetly — more than once. She seemed as if she did not want to let go of me.

"Dear mamma," I whispered sleepily, "I *am* so happy — I'm always happy, but to-night I feel so *extra* happy, somehow."

"Darling," said mamma.

And she kissed me again.

CHAPTER III.

COMING EVENTS.

THE shadow of coming changes began to fall over us very soon after that.

Indeed, the very next morning at breakfast I noticed that mamma looked pale and almost as if she had been crying, and father was, so to say, "extra" kind to her and to me. He talked and laughed more than usual, partly perhaps to prevent our noticing how silent dear mamma was, but mostly I think because that is the way men do when they are really anxious or troubled.

I don't fancy Haddie thought there was anything wrong — he was in a hurry to get off to school.

After breakfast mamma told me to go and practise for half an hour, and if she did not come to me then, I had better go on doing some of my lessons alone. She would look them over afterwards. And as I was going out of the room she called me back

and kissed me again — almost as she had done the night before.

That gave me courage to say something. For children were not, in my childish days, on such free and easy terms with their elders as they are now. And kind and gentle as mamma was, we knew very distinctly the sort of things she would think forward or presuming on our part.

"Mamma," I said, still hesitating a little.

"Well, dear," she replied. She was buttoning, or pretending to button, the band of the little brown holland apron I wore, so that I could not see her face, but something in the tone of her voice told me that my instinct was not mistaken.

"Mamma," I repeated, "may I say something? I have a feeling that — that you are — that there is something the matter."

Mamma did not answer at once. Then she said very gently, but quite kindly,

"Geraldine, my dear, you know that I tell you as much as I think it right to tell any one as young as you — I tell you more, of our plans and private matters and such things, than most mothers tell their little daughters. This has come about partly through your being so much alone with me. But

when I *don't* tell you anything, even though you may suspect there is something to tell, you should trust me that there is good reason for my not doing so."

"Yes," I said, but I could not stifle a little sigh. "Would you just tell me one thing, mamma," I went on; "it isn't anything that you're really unhappy about, is it?"

Again mamma hesitated.

"Dear child," she said, "try to put it out of your mind. I can only say this much to you, I am *anxious* more than troubled. There is nothing the matter that should really be called a trouble. But your father and I have a question of great importance to decide just now, and we are very — I may say really *terribly* — anxious to decide for the best. That is all I can tell you. Kiss me, my darling, and try to be your own bright little self. That will be a comfort and help to me."

I kissed her and I promised I would try to do as she wished. But it was with rather a heavy heart that I went to my practising. What *could* it be? I did try not to think of it, but it would keep coming back into my mind. And I was only a child. I had no experience of trouble or anxiety. After a

time my spirits began to rise again — there was a sort of excitement in the wondering what this great matter could be. I am afraid I did not succeed in putting it out of my mind as mamma wished me to do.

But the days went on without anything particular happening. I did not speak of what mamma had said to me to my brother. I knew she did not wish me to do so. And by degrees other things began to make me forget about it a little. It was just at that time, I remember, that some friend — an aunt on father's side, I think — sent me a present of *The Wide, Wide World*, and while I was reading it I seemed actually to live in the story. It was curious that I should have got it just then. If mamma had read it herself I am not sure that she would have given it to me. But after all, perhaps it served the purpose of preparing me a *little* — a very little — for what was before me in my own life.

It was nearly three weeks after the time I have described rather minutely that the blow fell, that Haddie and I were told the whole. I think, however, I will not go on telling *how* we were told, for I am afraid of making my story too long.

And of course, however good my memory is, I

cannot pretend that the conversations I relate took place *exactly* as I give them. I think I give the *spirit* of them correctly, but now that I have come to the telling of distinct facts, perhaps it will be better simply to narrate them.

You will remember my saying that my father had lost money very unexpectedly, and that this was what had obliged him to come to live at Mexington and work so hard. He had got the post he held there — it was in a bank — greatly through the influence of Mrs. Selwood, mamma's godmother, who lived in the country at some hours' distance from the town, and whose name was well known there, as she owned a great many houses and other property in the immediate neighbourhood.

Father was very glad to get this post, and very grateful to Mrs. Selwood. She took great interest in us all — that is to say, she was interested in Haddie and me because we were mamma's children, though she did not care for or understand children as a rule. But she was a faithful friend, and anxious to help father still more.

Just about the time I have got to in my story, the manager of a bank in South America, in some way connected with the one at Great Mexington,

became ill, and was told by the doctors that he must return to England and have a complete rest for two years. Mrs. Selwood had money connection with this bank too, and got to hear of what had happened. Knowing that father could speak both French and Spanish well, for he had been in the diplomatic service as a younger man, she at once applied for the appointment for him, and after some little delay she was told that he should have the offer of it for the two years.

Two years are not a very long time, even though the pay was high, but the great advantage of the offer was that the heads of the bank at Mexington promised, if all went well for that time, that some permanent post should be given to father in England on his return. This was what made him more anxious to accept the proposal than even the high pay. For Mrs. Selwood found out that he would not be able to save much of his salary, as he would have a large house to keep up, and would be expected to receive many visitors. On this account the post was never given to an unmarried man.

"If he accepts it," Mrs. Selwood wrote to mamma, "you, my dear Blanche, must go with him, and

some arrangement would have to be made about the children for the time. I would advise your sending them to school."

Now I think my readers will not be at a loss to understand why our dear mother had looked so troubled, even though on one side this event promised to be for our good in the end.

Father was allowed two or three weeks in which to make up his mind. The heads of the Mexington bank liked and respected him very much, and they quite saw that there were two sides to the question of his accepting the offer. The climate of the place was not very good — at least it was injurious to English people if they stayed there for long — and it was perfectly certain that it would be madness to take growing children like Haddie and me there.

This was the dark spot in it all to mamma, and indeed to father too. They were not afraid for themselves. They were both strong and still young, but they could not for a moment entertain the idea of taking *us*. And the thought of separation was terrible.

You see, being a small family, and living in a place like Great Mexington, where my parents had not many congenial friends, and being poor were

obliged to live carefully, *home* was everything to us all. We four were the whole world to each other, and knew no happiness apart.

I do not mean to say that I felt or saw all this at once, but looking back upon it from the outside, as it were, I see all that made it a peculiarly hard case, especially — at the beginning, that is to say — for mamma.

It seems strange that I did *not* take it all in — all the misery of it, I mean — at first, nor indeed for some time, not till I had actual experience of it. Even Haddie realised it more in anticipation than I did. He was two years older, and though he had never been at a boarding-school, still he knew something of school life. There were boarders at his school, and he had often seen and heard how, till they got accustomed to it at any rate, they suffered from home-sickness, and counted the days to the holidays.

And for us there were not to be any holidays! No certain prospect of them at best, though Mrs. Selwood said something vaguely about perhaps having us at Fernley for a visit in the summer. But it was very vague. And we had no near relations on mamma's side except Aunty Etta, who was in

India, and on father's no one who could possibly have us regularly for our holidays.

All this mamma grasped at once, and her grief was sometimes so extreme that, but for Mrs. Selwood, I doubt if father would have had the resolution to accept. But Mrs. Selwood was what is called "very sensible," perhaps just a little hard, and certainly not *sensitive*. And she put things before our parents in such a way that mamma felt it her duty to urge father to accept the offer, and father felt it *his* duty to put feelings aside and do so.

They went to stay at Fernley from a Saturday to a Monday to talk it well over, and it was when they came back on the Monday that we were told.

Before then I think we had both come to have a strong feeling that something was going to happen. I, of course, had some reason for this in what mamma had said to me, though I had forgotten about it a good deal, till this visit to Fernley brought back the idea of something unusual. For it was *very* seldom that we were left by ourselves.

We did not mind it much. After all, it was only two nights and one *whole* day, and that a Sunday, when my brother was at home, so we

stood at the door cheerfully enough, looking at our father and mother driving off in the clumsy, dingy old four-wheeler — though that is a modern word — which was the best kind of cab known at Mexington.

But when they were fairly off Haddie turned to me, and I saw that he was very grave. I was rather surprised.

"Why, Haddie," I said, "do you mind so much? They'll be back on Monday."

"No, of course I don't mind *that*," he said. "But I wonder why mamma looks so — so awfully trying-not-to-cry, you know."

"Oh," I said, "I don't think she's quite well. And she hates leaving us."

"No," said my brother, "there's something more."

And when he said that, I remembered the feeling I had had myself. I felt rather cross with Haddie; I wanted to forget it quite.

"You needn't try to frighten me like that," I said. "I meant to be quite happy while they were away — to please mamma, you know, by telling her so when she comes back."

Then Haddie, who really was a very good-natured, kind boy, looked sorry.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said; "perhaps it was my fancy. I don't want to be unhappy while they're away, I'm sure. I'm only too glad that to-day's Saturday and to-morrow Sunday."

And he did his very best to amuse me. We went out a walk that afternoon with the housemaid — quite a long walk, though it was winter. We went as far out of the town as we could get, to where there were fields, which in spring and summer still looked green, and through the remains of a little wood, pleasant even in the dullest season. It was our favourite walk, and the only pretty one near the town. There was a brook at the edge of the wood, which still did its best to sing merrily, and to forget how dingy and grimy its clear waters became a mile or two farther on; there were still a few treasures in the shape of ivy sprays and autumn-tinted leaves to gather and take home with us to deck our nursery.

I remember the look of it all so well. It was the favourite walk of many besides ourselves, especially on a Saturday, when the hard-worked Mexington folk were once free to ramble about — boys and girls not much older than ourselves among them, for in those days children were allowed to work in factories

much younger than they do now. We did not mind meeting some of our townsfellows. On the contrary, we felt a good deal of interest in them and liked to hear their queer way of talking, though we could scarcely understand anything they said. And we were very much interested indeed in some of the stories Lydia, who belonged to this part of the country, told us of her own life, in a village a few miles away, where there were two or three great factories, at which all the people about worked — men, women, and children too, so that sometimes, except for babies and very old people, the houses seemed quite deserted.

"And long ago before that," said Lydia, "when mother was a little lass, it was such a pretty village — cottages all over with creepers and honeysuckle — not ugly rows of houses as like each other as peas. The people worked at home on their own hand-looms then."

Lydia had a sense of the beautiful!

On our way home, of course, we called at Miss Fryer's — this time we had a whole shilling to spend, for there was Sunday's tea to think of as well as to-day's. We had never had so much at a time, and our consultation took a good while. We decided at

last on seven crumpets and seven Bath buns as usual, and in addition to these, three large currant tea-cakes, which our friend Susan told us would be all the better for toasting if not too fresh. And the remaining threepence we invested in a slice of sweet sandwich, which she told us would be perfectly good if kept in a tin tightly closed. The old Quakeress for once, I have always suspected, departed on this occasion from her rule of exact payment for all purchases, for it certainly seemed a very large slice of sweet sandwich for threepence.

We were rather tired with our walk that evening and went to bed early. Nothing more was said by Haddie about his misgivings. I think he hoped I had forgotten what had passed, but I had not. It had all come back again, the strange feeling of change and trouble in the air which had made me question mamma that morning two or three weeks ago.

But I did not as yet really believe it. I had never known what sorrow and trouble actually are. It is not many children who reach even the age I was then with so sunny and peaceful an experience of life. That anything could happen to us — to *me* — like what happened to "Ellen" in *The Wide*,

Wide World, I simply could not believe; even though if any one had talked to me about it and said that troubles must come and *do* come to all, and to some much more than to others, and that they might be coming to us, I should have agreed at once and said yes, of course I knew that was true.

The next day, Sunday, was very rainy. It made us feel dull, I think, though we did not really mind a wet Sunday as much as another day, for we never went a walk on Sunday. It was not thought right, and as we had no garden the day would have been a very dreary one to us, except for mamma.

She managed to make it pleasant. We went to church in the morning, and in the evening too sometimes. I think all children like going to church in the evening; there is something grown-up about it. And the rest of the day mamma managed to find interesting things for us to do. She generally had some book which she kept for reading aloud on Sunday — Dr. Adams's *Allegories*, "The Dark River" and others, were great favourites, and so were Bishop Wilberforce's *Agathos*. Some of them frightened me a little, but it was rather a pleasant sort of fright, there was something grand and solemn about it.

Then we sang hymns sometimes, and we always had a very nice tea, and mamma, and father too now and then, told us stories about when they were children and what they did on Sundays. It was much stricter for them than for us, though even for us many things were forbidden on Sundays which are now thought not only harmless but right.

Still, I never look back to the quiet Sundays in the dingy Mexington street with anything but a feeling of peace and gentle pleasure.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL SETTLED.

THAT Sunday — that last Sunday I somehow feel inclined to call it — stands out in my memory quite differently from its fellows. Both Haddie and I felt dull and depressed, partly owing no doubt to the weather, but still more, I think, from that vague fear of something being wrong which we were both suffering from, though we would not speak of it to each other.

It cleared up a little in the evening, and though it was cold and chilly we went to church. Mamma had said to us we might if we liked, and Lydia was going.

When we came in, cook sent us a little supper which we were very glad of; it cheered us up.

"Aren't you thankful they're coming home to-morrow?" I said to Haddie. "I've never minded their being away so much before."

They had been away two or three times that we

could remember, though never for longer than a day or two.

"Yes," said Haddie, "I'm very glad."

But that was all he said.

They did come back the next day, pretty early in the morning, as father had to be at the bank. He went straight there from the railway station, and mamma drove home with the luggage. She was very particular when she went to stay with her godmother to take nice dresses, for Mrs. Selwood would not have been pleased to see her looking shabby, and it would not have made her any more sympathising or anxious to help, but rather the other way. Long afterwards — at least some years afterwards, when I was old enough to understand — I remember Mrs. Selwood saying to me that it was mamma's courage and good management which made everybody respect her.

I was watching at the dining-room window, which looked out to the street, when the cab drove up. After the heavy rain the day before, it was for once a fine day, with some sunshine. And sunshine was rare at Great Mexington, especially in late November.

Mamma was looking out to catch the first glimpse of me — of course she knew that my brother would

be at school. There was a sort of sunshine on her face, at least I thought so at first, for she was smiling. But when I looked more closely there was something in the smile which gave me a queer feeling, startling me almost more than if I had seen that she was crying.

I think for my age I had a good deal of self-control of a certain kind. I waited till she had come in and kissed me and sent away the cab and we were alone. Then I shut the door and drew her to father's special arm-chair beside the fire.

"Mamma, dear," I half said, half whispered, "what is it?"

Mamma gave a sort of gasp or choke before she answered. Then she said,

"Why, dear, why should you think — oh, I don't know what I am saying," and she tried to laugh.

But I wouldn't let her.

"It's something in your face, mamma," I persisted.

She was silent for a moment.

"We had meant to tell you and Haddie this evening," she said, "father and I together; but perhaps it is better. Yes, my Geraldine, there is something. Till now it was not quite certain, though it has been hanging over us for some weeks, ever since ——"

"Since that day I asked you — the morning after father came home so late and you had been crying?"

"Yes, since then," said mamma.

She put her arm round me, and then she told me all that I have told already, or at least as much of it as she thought I could understand. She told it quietly, but she did not try not to cry — the tears just came trickling down her face, and she wiped them away now and then. I think the letting them come made her able to speak more calmly.

And I listened. I was very sorry for her, very *very* sorry. But you may think it strange — I have often looked back upon it with wonder myself, though I now feel as if I understood the causes of it better — when I tell you that I was *not* fearfully upset or distressed myself. I did not feel inclined to cry, *except* out of pity for mamma. And I listened with the most intense interest, and even curiosity. I was all wound up by excitement, for this was the first great event I had ever known, the first change in my quiet child-life.

And my excitement grew even greater when mamma came to the subject of what was decided about us children.

"Haddie of course must go to school," she said;

"to a larger and better school — Mrs. Selwood speaks of Rugby, if it can be managed. He will be happy there, every one says. But about you, my Geraldine."

"Oh, mamma," I interrupted, "do let me go to school too. I have always wanted to go, you know, and except for being away from you, I would far rather be a boarder. It's really being at school then. I know they rather look down upon day-scholars — Haddie says so."

Mamma looked at me gravely. Perhaps she was just a little disappointed, even though on the other hand she may have felt relieved too, at my taking the idea of this separation, which to her over-rode *everything*, which made the next two years a black cloud to her, so very philosophically. But she sighed. I fancy a suspicion of the truth came to her almost at once and added to her anxiety — the truth that I did not the least realise what was before me.

"We *are* thinking of sending you to school, my child," she said quietly, "and of course it must be as a boarder. Mrs. Selwood advises Miss Ledbury's school here. She has known the old lady long and has a very high opinion of her, and it is not very far from Fernley in case Miss Ledbury wished to consult

Mrs. Selwood about you in any way, or in case you were ill."

"I am very glad," I said. "I should like to go to Miss Ledbury's."

My fancy had been tickled by seeing the girls at her school walking out two and two in orthodox fashion. I thought it must be delightful to march along in a row like that, and to have a partner of your own size to talk to as much as you liked.

Mamma said no more just then. I think she felt at a loss what to say. She was afraid of making me unnecessarily unhappy, and on the other hand she dreaded my finding the reality all the worse when I came to contrast it with my rose-coloured visions.

She consulted father, and he decided that it was best to leave me to myself and my own thoughts.

"She is a very young child still," he said to mamma. (All this of course I was told afterwards.) "It is quite possible that she will *not* suffer from the separation as we have feared. It may be much easier for her than if she had been two or three years older."

Haddie had no illusions. From the very first he

took it all in, and that very bitterly. But he was, as I have said, a very good boy, and a boy with a great deal of resolution and firmness. He said nothing to discourage me. Mamma told him how surprised she was at my way of taking it, and he agreed with father that perhaps I would not be really unhappy.

And I do think that my chief unhappiness during the next few weeks came from the sight of dear mamma's pale, worn face, which she could not hide, try as she might to be bright and cheerful.

There was of course a great deal of bustle and preparation, and all children enjoy that, I fancy. Even Haddie was interested about his school outfit. He was to go to a preparatory school at Rugby till he could get into the big school. And as far as school went, he told me he was sure he would like it very well, it was only the — but there he stopped.

"The what?" I asked.

"Oh, the being all separated," he said gruffly.

"But you'd have had to go away to a big school some day," I reminded him. "You didn't want always to go to a day-school."

"No," he allowed, "but it's the holidays."

The holidays! I had not thought about that part of it.

"Oh, I daresay something nice will be settled for the holidays," I said lightly.

In one way Haddie was very lucky. Mrs. Selwood had undertaken the whole charge of his education for the two years our parents were to be away. And after that "we shall see," she said.

She had great ideas about the necessity of giving a boy the very best schooling possible, but she had not at all the same opinion about *girls'* education. She was a clever woman in some ways, but very old-fashioned. Her own upbringing had been at a time when *very* little learning was considered needful or even advisable for our sex. And as she had good practical capacities, and had managed her own affairs sensibly, she always held herself up both in her own mind and to others as a specimen of an *un*learned lady who had got on far better than if she had had all the "'ologies," as she called them, at her fingers' ends.

This, I think, was one reason why she approved of Miss Ledbury's school, which, as you will hear, was certainly not conducted in accordance with the modern ideas which even then were beginning to

make wise parents ask themselves if it was right to spend ten times as much on their sons' education as on their daughters'.

"Teach a girl to write a good hand, to read aloud so that you can understand what she says, to make a shirt and make a pudding and to add up the butcher's book correctly, and she'll do," Mrs. Selwood used to say.

"And what about accomplishments?" some one might ask.

"She should be able to play a tune on the piano, and to sing a nice English song or two if she has a voice, and maybe to paint a wreath of flowers if her taste lies that way. That sort of thing would do no harm if she doesn't waste time over it," the old lady would allow, with great liberality, thinking over her own youthful acquirements no doubt.

I daresay there was a foundation of solid sense in the first part of her advice. I don't see but that girls nowadays might profit by some of it. And in many cases they *do*. It is quite in accordance with modern thought to be able to make a good many "puddings," though home-made shirts are not called for. But as far as the "accomplishments" go, I

should prefer none to such a smattering of them as our old friend considered more than enough.

So far less thought on Mrs. Selwood's part was bestowed on Geraldine — that is myself, of course — than on Haddon, as regarded the school question. And mamma *had* to be guided by Mrs. Selwood's advice to a great extent just then. She had so much to do and so little time to do it in, that it would have been impossible for her to go hunting about for a school for me more in accordance with her own ideas. And she knew that personally Miss Ledbury was well worthy of all respect.

She went to see her once or twice to talk about me, and make the best arrangements possible. The first of these visits left a pleasanter impression on her mind than the second. For the first time she saw Miss Ledbury alone, and found her gentle and sympathising, and full of conscientious interest in her pupils, so that it seemed childish to take objection to some of the rules mentioned by the schoolmistress which in her heart mamma did not approve of.

One of these was that all the pupils' letters were to be read by one of the teachers, and as to this Miss Ledbury said she could make no exception. Then.

again, no story-books were permitted, except such as were read aloud on the sewing afternoons. But if I spent my holidays there, as was only too probable, this rule should be relaxed.

The plan for Sundays, too, struck my mother disagreeably.

"My poor Geraldine," she said to father, when she was telling him all about it, "I don't know how she will stand such a dreary day."

Father suggested that I should be allowed to write my weekly letter to them on Sunday, and mamma said she would see if that could be.

And then father begged her not to look at the dark side of things.

"After all," he said, "Geraldine is very young, and will accommodate herself better than you think to her new circumstances. She will enjoy companions of her own age too. And we know that Miss Ledbury is a good and kind woman — the disadvantages seem trifling, though I should not like to think the child was to be there for longer than these two years."

Mamma gave in to this. Indeed, there seemed nothing else to do. But the second time she went to see Miss Ledbury, the school-mistress introduced

her niece — her "right hand," as she called her — a woman of about forty, named Miss Aspinall, who, though only supposed to be second in command, was really the principal authority in the establishment, much more than poor old Miss Ledbury, whose health was failing, realised herself.

Mamma did not take to Miss Aspinall. But it was now far too late to make any change, and she tried to persuade herself that she was nervously fanciful.

And here, perhaps, I had better say distinctly, that Miss Aspinall was not a bad or cruel woman. She was, on the contrary, truly conscientious and perfectly sincere. But she was wanting in all finer feelings and instincts. She had had a hard and unloving childhood, and had almost lost the power of caring much for any one. She loved her aunt after a fashion, but she thought her weak. She was just, or wished to be so, and with some of the older pupils she got on fairly well. But she did not understand children, and took small interest in the younger scholars, beyond seeing that they kept the rules and were not complained of by the under teachers who took charge of them. And as the younger pupils were very seldom boarders it did

not very much matter, as they had their own homes and mothers to make them happy once school hours were over.

Mamma did not know that there were scarcely any boarders as young as I, for when she first asked about the other pupils, Miss Ledbury, thinking principally of lessons, said, "oh yes," there was a nice little class just about my age, where I should feel quite at home.

A few days before *the* day — the day of separation for us all — mamma took me to see Miss Ledbury. She thought I would feel rather less strange if I had been there once, and had seen the lady who was to be my school-mistress.

I knew the house — Green Bank, it was called — by sight. It was a little farther out of the town than ours, and had a melancholy bit of garden in front, and a sort of playground at the back. It was not a large house — indeed, it was not really large enough for the number of people living in it — twenty to thirty boarders, and a number of day-scholars, who of course helped to fill the schoolrooms and to make them hot and airless, four resident teachers, and four or five servants. But in those days people did not think nearly as much as now

about ventilation and lots of fresh air, and perfectly pure water, and all such things, which we now know to be quite as important to our health as food and clothes.

Mamma rang the bell. Everything about Green Bank was neat and orderly, prim, if not grim. So was the maid-servant who opened the door, and in answer to mamma's inquiry for Miss Ledbury, showed us into the drawing-room, a square moderate-sized-room, at the right hand of the passage.

I can remember the look of that room even now, perfectly. It was painfully neat, not exactly ugly, for most of the furniture was of the spindle-legged quaint kind, to which everybody now gives the general name of "Queen Anne." There were a few books set out on the round table, there was a cottage piano at one side, there were some faint water-colours on the wall, and a rather nice clock on the white marble mantelpiece, the effect of which was spoilt by a pair of huge "lustres," as they were called, at each side of it. The carpet was very ugly, large and sprawly in pattern, and so was the hearth-rug. They were the newest things in the room, and greatly admired by Miss Ledbury and her niece, who were full of the bad taste of the day in furniture, and would gladly

have turned out all the delicate spidery-looking tables and chairs to make way for heavy and cumbersome sofas and ottomans, but for the question of expense, and perhaps for the sake of old association on the elder lady's part.

There was no fire, though it was November, and mamma shivered a little as she sat down, possibly, however not altogether from cold. It was between twelve and one in the morning — that was the hour at which Miss Ledbury asked parents to call.

Afterwards, when I got to know the rules of the house, I found that the drawing-room fire was never lighted except on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, or on some very special occasion.

I stood beside mamma. Somehow I did not feel inclined to sit down. I was full of a strange kind of excitement, half pleasant, half frightening. I think the second half prevailed as the moments went on. Mamma did not speak, but I felt her hand clasping my shoulder.

Then at last the door opened.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNPROMISING BEGINNING.

My first sight of Miss Ledbury was a sort of agreeable disappointment. She was not the least like what I had imagined, though till I did see her I do not think I knew that I had imagined anything! She had been much less in my thoughts than her pupils; it was the idea of companions, the charm of being one of a party of other girls, with a place of my own among them, that my fancy had been full of. I don't think I cared very much what the teachers were like.

What I did see was a very small, fragile-looking old lady, with quite white hair, a black or purple — I am not sure which, anyway it was dark — silk dress, and a soft fawn-coloured cashmere shawl. She had a white lace cap, tied with ribbons under her chin, and black lace mittens. Looking back now, I cannot picture her in any other dress. I cannot remember ever seeing her with a bonnet on, and yet she must

have worn one, as she went to church regularly. Her face was small and still pretty, and the eyes were naturally sweet, sometimes they had a twinkle of humour in them, sometimes they looked almost hard. The truth was that she was a gentle, kind-hearted person by nature, but a narrow life and education had stunted her power of sympathy, and she thought it wrong to give way to feeling. She was conscious of what she believed to be weakness in herself, and was always trying to be firm and determined. And since her niece had come to live with her, this put-on sternness had increased.

Yet I was never really afraid of Miss Ledbury, though I never — well, perhaps that is rather too strong — almost never, I should say, felt at ease with her.

I was, I suppose, a very shy child, but till now the circumstances of my life had not brought this out.

This first time of seeing my future school-mistress I liked her very much. There was indeed something very attractive about her — something almost "fairy-godmother-like" which took my fancy.

We did not stay long. Miss Ledbury was not without tact, and she saw that the mention of the

approaching parting, the settling the day and hour at which I was to come to Green Bank to *stay*, were very, very trying to mamma. And I almost think her misunderstanding of me began from that first interview. In her heart I fancy she was shocked at my coolness, for she did not know, or if she ever had known, she had forgotten, much about children — their queer contradictory ways of taking things, how completely they are sometimes the victims of their imagination, how little they realise anything they have had no experience of.

All that the old lady did not understand in me, she put down to my being spoilt and selfish. She even, I believe, thought me forward

Still, she spoke kindly — said she hoped I should soon feel at home at Green Bank, and try to get on well with my lessons, so that when my dear mamma returned she would be astonished at the progress I had made.

I did not quite understand what she said — the word "progress" puzzled me. I wondered if it had anything to do with the pilgrim's progress, and I was half inclined to ask if it had, and to tell her that I had read the history of Christian and his family quite through, two or three times. But mamma had

already got up to go, so I only said "Yes" rather vaguely, and Miss Ledbury kissed me somewhat coldly.

As soon as we found ourselves outside in the street again, mamma made some little remark. She wanted to find out what kind of impression had been left on me, though she would not have considered it right to ask me straight out what I thought of the lady who was going to be my superior — in a sense to fill a parent's place to me.

And I remember replying that I thought Miss Ledbury must be very, very old — nearly a hundred, I should think.

"Oh dear no, not nearly as old as that," mamma said quickly. "You must not say anything like that, Geraldine. It would offend her. She cannot be more than sixty."

I opened my eyes. I thought it would be very nice to be a hundred.

But before I had time to say more, my attention was distracted. For just at that moment, turning a corner, we almost ran into the procession I was so eager to join — Miss Ledbury's girls, returning two and two from their morning constitutional.

I felt my cheeks grow red with excitement. I

stared at them, and some of them, I think, looked at me. Mamma looked at them too, but instead of getting red, her face grew pale.

They passed so quickly, that I was only able to glance at two or three of the twenty or thirty faces. I looked at the smallest of the train with the most interest, though one older face at the very end caught my attention almost without my knowing it.

When they had passed I turned to mamma.

"Did you see that little girl with the rosy cheeks, mamma? The one with a red feather in her hat. *Doesn't* she look nice?"

"She looked a good-humoured little person," said mamma. In her heart she thought the rosy-faced child rather common-looking and far too showily dressed, but that was not unusual among the rich Mexington people, and she would not have said anything like that to me. "I did notice one *very* sweet face," she went on, "I mean the young lady at the end — one of the governesses no doubt."

I had, as I said, noticed her too, and mamma's words impressed it upon me. Mamma seemed quite cheered by this passing glimpse, and she went on speaking.

"She must be one of the younger teachers, I

should think. I hope you may be in her class. You must tell me if you are when you write to me, and tell me her name."

I promised I would.

The next two or three days I have no clear remembrance of at all. They seemed all bustle and confusion — though through everything I recollect mamma's pale drawn face, and the set look of Haddie's mouth. He was so determined not to break down. Of father we saw very little — he was terribly busy. But when he was at home, he seemed to be always whistling, or humming a tune, or making jokes.

"How pleased father seems to be about going so far away," I said once to Haddie. But he did not answer.

He — Haddie — was to go a part of the way in the same train as father and mamma. They were to start on the Thursday, and I was taken to Green Bank on Wednesday morning. Father took me — and Lydia. I was such a little girl that mamma thought Lydia should go with me to unpack and arrange my things, and she never thought that any one could object to this. For she had never been at school herself, and did not know much about school

ways. I think the first beginning of my troubles and disappointments was about Lydia.

Father and I were shown into the drawing-room. But when the door opened this time, it was not to admit gentle old Miss Ledbury. Instead of her in came a tall, thin woman, dressed in gray — she had black hair done rather tightly, and a black lace bow on the top of her head.

Father was standing looking out of the window, and I beside him holding his hand. I was not crying. I had had one sudden convulsive fit of sobs early that morning when mamma came for a moment into my room, and for the first time it *really* came over me that I was leaving her. But she almost prayed me to try not to cry, and the feeling that I was helping her, joined to the excitement I was in, made it not so very difficult to keep quiet. I do not even think my eyes were red.

Father turned at the sound of the door opening.

"Miss Ledbury," he began.

"Not Miss Ledbury. I am Miss Aspinall, her *niece*," said the lady; she was not pleased at the mistake.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said poor father. "I understood ——"

"Miss Ledbury is not very well this morning," said Miss Aspinall. "She deputed me to express her regrets."

"Oh certainly," said father. "This is my little daughter — you have seen her before, I suppose?"

"No," said the lady, holding out her hand. "How do you do, my dear?"

I did not speak. I stared up at her, I felt so confused and strange. I scarcely heard what father went on to say — some simple messages from mamma about my writing to them, and so on, and the dates of the mails, the exact address, etc., etc., to all of which Miss Aspinall listened with a slight bend of her head or a stiff "indeed," or "just so."

This was not encouraging. I am afraid even father's buoyant spirits went down: I think he had had some idea that if he came himself he would be able to make friends with my school-mistress and be able to ensure her special friendliness. But it was clear that nothing of this kind was to be done with the niece.

So he said at last,

"Well, I think that is all. Good-bye, my little woman, then. Good-bye, my darling. She will be a

"GOOD-BYE!"—C. V. p. 71.

good girl, I am sure, Miss Aspinall; she has been a dear good child at home."

His voice was on the point of breaking, but the governess stood there stonily. His praise of me was not the way to win her favour. I do believe she would have liked me better if he had said I had been so naughty and troublesome at home that he trusted the discipline of school would do me good. And when I glanced up at Miss Aspinall's face, something seemed to choke down the sob which was beginning again to rise in my throat.

"Good-bye, my own little girl," said father. One more kiss and he was gone.

My luggage was in the hall — which was really a passage scarcely deserving the more important name — and beside it stood Lydia. Miss Aspinall looked at her coldly.

"Who ——" she began, when I interrupted her.

"It's Lydia," I said. "She's come to unpack my things. Mamma sent her."

"Come to unpack your things," repeated the governess. "There must be some mistake — that is quite unnecessary. There is no occasion for you to wait," she said to poor Lydia, with a slight gesture towards the door.

Lydia grew very red.

"Miss Geraldine won't know about them all, I'm afraid," she began. "She has not been used to taking the charge of her things yet."

"Then the sooner she learns the better," said Miss Aspinall, and Lydia dared not persist. She turned to me, looking ready to burst out crying again, though, as she had been doing little else for three days, one might have thought her tears were exhausted.

"Good-bye, dear Miss Geraldine," she said, half holding out her arms. I flew into them. I was beginning to feel very strange.

"Good-bye, dear Lydia," I said.

"You will write to me, Miss Geraldine?"

"Of course I will; I know your address," I said. Lydia was going to her own home to work with a dressmaker sister in hopes of coming back to us at the end of the two years.

"Miss Le Marchant" (I think I have never said that our family name was Le Marchant), said a cold voice, "I really cannot wait any longer; you must come upstairs at once to take off your things."

Lydia glanced at me.

"I beg pardon," she said; and then she too was gone.

Long afterwards the poor girl told me that her heart was nearly bursting when she left me, but she had the good sense to say nothing to add to mamma's distress, as she knew that my living at Green Bank was all settled about. She could only hope the other governesses might be kinder than the one she had seen.

Miss Aspinall walked upstairs, telling me to follow her. It was not a very large house, but it was a high one and the stairs were steep. It seemed to me that I had climbed up a long way when at last she opened a door half-way down a dark passage.

"This is your room," she said, as she went in.

I followed her eagerly. I don't quite know what I expected. I had not been told if I was to have a room to myself or not. But at first I think I was rather startled to see three beds in a room not much larger than my own one at home — three beds and two wash-hand stands, a large and a small, two chests of drawers, a large and a small also, which were evidently considered to be toilet-tables as well, as each had a looking-glass, and three chairs.

My eyes wandered round. It was all quite neat, though dull. For the one window looked on to the side-wall of the next-door house, and much light

could not have got in at the best of times, added to which, the day was a very gray one. But the impression it made upon me was more that of a tidy and clean servants' room than of one for ladies, even though only little girls.

I stood still and silent.

"This is your bed," said Miss Aspinall next, touching a small white counterpaned iron bedstead in one corner—I was glad it was in a corner. "The Miss Smiths are your companions. They share the large chest of drawers, and your things will go into the smaller one."

"There won't be nearly room enough," I said quickly. I had yet to learn the habit of not saying out whatever came into my head.

"Nonsense, child," said the governess. "There must be room enough for you if there is room enough for much older and ——" she stopped. "At your age many clothes are not requisite. I think, on the whole, it will be better for you not to unpack or arrange your own things. One of the governesses shall do so, and all that you do not actually require must stay in your trunk and be put in the box-room."

I did not pay very much attention to what she said. I don't think I clearly understood it, for, as I

have said, in some ways I was rather a slow child. And my thoughts were running more on the Miss Smiths and the rest of my future companions than on my wardrobe. If I had taken in that it was not only my clothes that were in question, but that my little household gods, my special pet possessions, were not to be left in my own keeping, I would have minded much more.

"Now take off your things at once," said Miss Aspinall. "You must keep on your boots till your shoes are got out, but take care not to stump along the passages. Do your hands want washing? No, you have your gloves on. As soon as you are ready, go down two flights of stairs till you come to the passage under this on the next floor. The door at the end is the second class schoolroom, where you will be shown your place."

Then she went away, leaving me to my own reflections. Not a word of sympathy or encouragement, not a pat on my shoulder as she passed me, nor a kindly glance out of her hard eyes. But at the time I scarcely noticed this. My mind was still full of not unpleasant excitement, though I was beginning to feel tired and certainly very confused and bewildered.

I sat down for a moment on the edge of my little bed when Miss Aspinall left me, without hastening to take off my coat and bonnet. We wore bonnets mostly in those days, though hats were beginning to come into fashion for young girls.

"I wish there were only two beds, not three," I said to myself. "And I would like the little girl with the rosy face to sleep in my room. I wonder if she's Miss Smith perhaps. I wonder if there's several little girls as little as me. I'd like to know all their names, so as to write and tell them to mamma and Haddie."

The inclination to cry had left me — fortunately in some ways, though perhaps if I had made my *début* in the schoolroom looking very woe-begone and tearful I should have made a better impression. My future companions would have felt sorry for me. As it was, when I had taken off my things I made my way downstairs as I had been directed, and opening the schoolroom door — I remember wondering to myself what second class schoolroom could mean: would it have long seats all round, something like a second-class railway carriage? — walked in coolly enough.

The room felt airless and close, though it was a

cold day. And at the first glance it seemed to me perfectly full of people — girls — women indeed in my eyes many of them were, they were so much bigger and older than I — in every direction, more than I could count. And the hum of voices was very confusing, the *hums* I should say, for there were two or three different sets of reading aloud, or lessons repeating, going on at once.

I stood just inside the door. Two or three heads were turned in my direction at the sound I made in opening it, but quickly bent over their books again, and for some moments no one paid any attention to me. Then suddenly a governess happened to catch sight of me. It was the same sweet-faced girl whom mamma had noticed at the end of the long file in the street.

She looked at me once, then seemed at a loss, then she looked at me again, and at last said something to the girl beside her, and getting up from her seat went to the end of the room, and spoke to a small elderly woman in a brown stuff dress, who was evidently another governess.

This person — I suppose I should say lady — turned round and stared at me. Then she said something to the younger governess, nothing very pleasant, I

fancy, for the sweet-looking one — I had better call her by her name, which was Miss Fenmore — went back to her place with a heightened colour.

You may ask how I can remember all these little particulars so exactly. Perhaps I do not quite do so, but still, all that happened just then made a very strong impression on me, and I have thought it over so much and so often, especially since I have had children of my own, that it is difficult to tell quite precisely how much is real memory, how much the after knowledge of how things must have been, to influence myself and others as they did. And later, too, I talked them over with those who were older than I at the time, and could understand more.

So there I stood, a very perplexed little person, though still more perplexed than distressed or disappointed, by the door. Now and then some head was turned to look at me with a sort of stealthy curiosity, but there was no kindness in any of the glances, and the young governess kept her eyes turned away. I was not a pretty child. My hair was straight and not noticeable in any way, and it was tightly plaited, as was the fashion, *unless* a child's hair was thick enough to make pretty ringlets. My face was rather thin and pale, and there

was nothing of dimpling childish loveliness about me. I was rather near-sighted too, and I daresay that often gave me a worried, perhaps a fretful expression.

After all, I did not have to wait very long. The elderly governess finished the page she was reading aloud — she may have been dictating to her pupils, I cannot say — and came towards me.

"Did Miss Aspinall send you here?" she said abruptly.

I looked up at her. She seemed to me no better than our cook, and not half so good-natured.

"Yes," I said.

"Yes," she repeated, as if she was very shocked. "Yes *who*, if you please? Yes, Miss ——?"

"Yes, Miss," I said in a matter-of-fact way.

"What manners! Fie!" said Miss ——; afterwards I found her name was Broom. "I think indeed it was quite time for you to come to school. If you cannot say my name, you can at least say ma'am."

I stared up at her. I think my trick of staring must have been rather provoking, and perhaps even must have seemed rude, though it arose entirely from my not understanding.

"I don't know your name, Miss — ma'am," I said. I spoke clearly. I was not frightened. And a titter went round the forms. Miss Broom was angry at being put in the wrong.

"Miss Aspinall sent you to my class, *Miss Broom's* class," she said.

"No, ma'am — Miss Broom — she didn't."

The governess thought I meant to be impertinent — impertinent, poor me!

And with no very gentle hand, she half led, half pushed me towards her end of the room, where there was a vacant place on one of the forms.

"Silence, young ladies," she said, for some whispering was taking place. "Go on with your copying out."

And then she turned to me with a book.

"Let me hear how you can read," she said.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW WORLD.

I COULD read aloud well, unusually well, I think, for mamma had taken great pains with my pronunciation. She was especially anxious that both Haddie and I should speak well, and not catch the Great Mexington accent, which was both peculiar and ugly.

But the book which Miss Broom had put before me was hardly a fair test. I don't remember what it was — some very dry history, I think, bristling with long words, and in very small print. I did not take in the sense of what I was reading in the very least, and so, of course, I read badly, tumbling over the long words, and putting no intelligence into my tone. I think, too, my teacher was annoyed at the purity of my accent, for no one could possibly have mistaken *her* for anything but what she was — a native of Middleshire. She corrected me once or twice, then shut the book impatiently.

"Very bad," she said, "very bad indeed for eleven years old."

"I am not eleven, Miss Broom," I said. "I am only nine past."

"Little girls must not contradict, and must not be rude," was the reply.

What had I said that could be called rude? I tried to think, thereby bringing on myself a reprimand for inattention, which did not have the effect of brightening my wits, I fear.

I think I was put through a sort of examination as to all my acquirements. I know I came out of it very badly, for Miss Broom pronounced me so backward that there was no class, not even the youngest, in the school, which I was really fit for. There was nothing for it, however, but to put me into this lowest class, and she said I must do extra work in play hours to make up to my companions.

Even my French, which I now *know* must have been good, was found fault with by Miss Broom, who said my accent was extraordinary. And certainly, if hers was Parisian, mine must have been worse than that of Stratford-le-Bow!

Still, I was not unhappy. I thought it must be always like that at school, and I said to myself I

"LITTLE GIRLS MUST NOT CONTRADICT, AND MUST NOT BE RUDE."—
v. vi. p. 82.

really would work hard to make up to the others, who were so much, much cleverer than I. And I sat contentedly enough in my place, doing my best to learn a page of English grammar by heart, from time to time peeping round the table, till, to my great satisfaction and delight, I caught sight of the rosy-cheeked damsel at the farther end of the table.

I was so pleased that I wonder I did not jump up from my place and run round to speak to her, forgetful that though I had thought so much of her, she had probably never noticed me at all the only other time of our meeting, or rather passing each other.

But I felt Miss Broom's eye upon me, and sat still. I acquitted myself pretty fairly of my page of grammar, leading to the dry remark from the governess that it was plain I "could learn if I chose." As this was the first thing I had been given to learn, the implied reproach was not exactly called for. But none of Miss Broom's speeches were remarkable for being appropriate. They depended much more on the mood she happened to be in herself than upon anything else.

I can clearly remember most of that day. I have a vision of a long dining-table, long at least it

seemed to me, and a plateful of roast mutton and potatoes which I could not manage to finish, followed by rice pudding with which I succeeded better, though I was not the least hungry. Miss Aspinall was at one end of the table, Miss Broom at the other, and Miss Fenmore, who seemed always to be jumping up to ring the bell or hand the governesses something or other that had been forgotten by the servant, sat somewhere in the middle.

No one spoke unless spoken to by one of the teachers. Miss Aspinall shot out little remarks from time to time about the weather, and replied graciously enough to one or two of the older girls who ventured to ask if Miss Ledbury's cold, or headache, was better.

Then came the grace, followed by a shoving back of forms, and a march in order of age, or place in class rather, to the door, and thence down the passage to what was called the big schoolroom — a room on the ground floor, placed where by rights the kitchen should have been, I fancy. It was the only large room in the house, and I think it must have been built out beyond the original walls on purpose.

And then — there re-echo on my ears even now

the sudden bursting out of noise, the loosening of a score and a half of tongues, girls' tongues too, forcibly restrained since the morning. For this was the recreation hour, and on a wet day, to make up for not going a walk, the "young ladies" were allowed from two to three to chatter as much as they liked — in English instead of in the fearful and wonderful jargon yclept "French."

I stood in a corner by myself, staring, no doubt. I felt profoundly interested. This was a *little* more like what I had pictured to myself, though I had not imagined it would be quite so noisy and bewildering. But some of the girls seemed very merry, and their laughter and chatter fascinated me — if only I were one of them, able to laugh and chatter too! Should I ever be admitted to share their fun?

The elder girls did not interest me. They seemed to me quite grown-up. Yet it was from their ranks that came the first token of interest in me — of notice that I was there at all.

"What's your name?" said a tall thin girl with fair curls, which one could see she was very proud of. She was considered a beauty in the school. She was silly, but very good-natured. She spoke with a sort of lisp, and very slowly, so her question

did not strike me as rude. Nor was it meant to be so. It was a mixture of curiosity and amiability.

"My name," I repeated, rather stupidly. I was startled by being spoken to.

"Yes, your name. Didn't Miss Lardner say what's your name? Dear me — don't stand gaping there like a monkey on a barrel-organ," said another girl.

By this time a little group had gathered round me. The girls composing it all laughed, and though it does not sound very witty — to begin with, I never heard of a monkey "gaping" — I have often thought since that there was some excuse for the laughter. I was small and thin, and I had a trick of screwing up my eyes which made them look smaller than they really were. And my frock was crimson merino with several rows of black velvet above the hem of the skirt.

I was not offended. But I did not laugh. The girl who had spoken last was something of a tom-boy, and looked upon also as a wit. Her name was Josephine Mellor, and her intimate friends called her Joe. She had very fuzzy red hair, and rather good brown eyes.

"I say," she went on again, "what *is* your name?

And are you going to stay to dinner every day, or only when it rains, like Lizzie Burt?"

Who was Lizzie Burt? That question nearly set my ideas adrift again. But the consciousness of my superior position fortunately kept me to the point.

"I am going to be at dinner always," I said proudly. "I am a boarder."

The girls drew a little nearer, with evidently increased interest.

"A boarder," repeated Josephine. "Then Harriet Smith'll have to give up being baby. You're ever so much younger than her, I'm sure."

"What are you saying about me?" said Harriet, who had caught the sound of her own name, as one often does.

"Only that that pretty snub nose of yours is going to be put out of joint," said Miss Mellor mischievously.

Harriet came rushing forward. She was my rosy-cheeked girl! Her face was redder than usual. I felt very vexed with Miss Mellor, even though I did not quite understand her.

"What are you saying?" the child called out. "I'm not going to have any of your teasing, Joe."

"It's not teasing — it's truth," said the elder girl. "You're not the baby any more. *She*," and she pointed to me, "she's younger than you."

"How old are you?" said Harriet roughly.

"Nine past," I said. "Nine and a half."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Harriet. "I'm only nine and a month. I'm still the baby, Miss Joe."

She was half a head at least taller than I, and broad in proportion.

"What a mite you are, to be sure," said Miss Mellor, "nine and a half and no bigger than that."

I felt myself getting red. I think one or two of the girls must have had perception enough to feel a little sorry for me, for one of them — I fancy it was Miss Lardner — said in a good-natured patronising way,

"You haven't told us your name yet, after all."

"It's Geraldine," I said. "That's my first name, and I'm always called it."

"Geraldine what?" said the red-haired girl.

"Geraldine Theresa Le Marchant — that's all my names."

"My goodness," said Miss Mellor, "how grand we are! Great Mexington's growing quite aristocratic. I didn't know monkeys had such fine names."

Some of the girls laughed, some, I think, thought her as silly as she was.

"Where do you come from?" was the next question.

"Come from?" I repeated. "I don't know."

At this they all did laugh, and I suppose it was only natural. Suddenly Harriet Smith made a sort of dash at me.

"Oh, I say," she exclaimed. "I know. She's going to sleep in our room. I saw them putting sheets on the bed in the corner, but Jane wouldn't tell me who they were for. Emma," she called out loudly to a girl of fourteen or fifteen, "Emma, I say, she's going to sleep in our room I'm sure."

Emma Smith was taller and thinner and paler than her sister, but still they were rather like. Perhaps it was for that very reason that they got on so badly — they might have been better friends if they had been more unlike. As it was, they quarrelled constantly, and I must say it was generally Harriet's fault. She was very spoilt, but she had something hearty and merry about her, and so had Emma. They were the daughters of a rich Great Mexington manufacturer, and they had no mother. They were favourites in the school, partly I suspect

because they had lots of pocket money, and used to invite their companions to parties in the holidays. But they were not mean or insincere, though rough and noisy — more like boys than girls.

Emma came bouncing forward.

"I say," she began to me, "if it's true you're to sleep in our room I hope you understand you must do what I tell you. I'm the eldest. You're not to back up Harriet to disobey me."

"No," I said. "I don't want to do anything like that."

"Well, then," said Harriet, "you'll be Emma's friend, not mine."

My face fell, and I suppose Harriet saw it. She came closer to me and looked at me well, as if expecting me to answer. But for the first time since I had been in my new surroundings I felt more than bewildered — I felt frightened and lonely, terribly lonely.

"Oh, mamma," I thought to myself, "I wish I could see you to tell you about it. It isn't a bit like what I thought it would be."

But I said nothing aloud. I think now that if I had burst out crying it would have been better for me, but I had very little power of expressing my-

self, and Haddie had instilled into me a great horror of being a cry-baby at school.

In their rough way, however, several of the girls were kind-hearted, the two Smiths perhaps as much so as any. Harriet came close up to me.

"I'm only in fun," she said; "of course we'll be friends. I'll tell you how we'll do," and she put her fat little arm round me in a protecting way which I much appreciated. "Come over here," she went on in a lower voice, "where none of the big ones can hear what we say," and she drew me, nothing loth, to the opposite corner of the room.

As we passed through the group of older girls standing about, one or two fragments of their talk reached my ears.

"Yes — I'm sure it's the same. He's a bank clerk, I think. I've heard papa speak of them. They're awfully poor — come-down-in-the-world sort of people."

"Oh, then, I expect when she's old enough she'll be a governess — perhaps she'll be a sort of teacher here to begin with."

Then followed some remark about looking far ahead, and a laugh at the idea of "the monkey" ever developing into a governess.

But after my usual fashion it was not till I thought it over afterwards that I understood that it was I and my father they had been discussing. In the meantime I was enjoying a confidential talk with Harriet Smith — that is to say, I was listening to all she said to me; she did not seem to expect me to say much in reply.

I felt flattered by her condescension, but I did not in my heart feel much interest in her communications. They were mostly about Emma — how she tried to bully her, Harriet, because she herself was five years older, and how the younger girl did not intend to stand it much longer. Emma was as bad as a boy.

"As bad as a boy," I repeated. "I don't know what you mean."

"That's because you've not got a brother, I suppose," said Harriet. "Our brother's a perfect nuisance. He's so spoilt — papa lets him do just as he likes. Emma and I hate the holidays because of him being at home. But it's the worst for me, you see. Emma hates Fred bullying her, so she might know I hate her bullying me."

This was all very astonishing to me.

"I have a brother," I said after a moment or two's reflection.

"Then you know what it is. Why didn't you say so?" asked Harriet.

"Because I don't know what it is. Haddie never teases me. I love being with him."

"My goodness! Then you're not like most," said Harriet elegantly, opening her eyes.

She asked me some questions after this — as to where we lived, how many servants we had, and so on. Some I answered — some I could not, as I was by no means as worldly-wise as this precocious young person.

She gave me a great deal of information about school — she hated the governesses, except the old lady, and she didn't care about her much. Miss Broom was her special dislike. But she liked school very well, she'd been there a year now, and before that she had a daily governess at home, and it was very dull indeed. What had I done till now — had I had a governess?

"Oh no," I said. "I had mamma."

"Was she good to you," asked my new friend, "or was she very strict?"

I stared at Harriet. Mamma was strict, but she was very, very good to me. I said so.

"Then why are you a boarder?" she asked.

"*We*'ve not got a mamma, but even if we had I'm sure she wouldn't teach us herself. I suppose your mamma isn't rich enough to pay for a governess for you."

"I don't know," I said simply. I had never thought in this way of mamma's teaching me, but I was not at all offended. "I don't think any governess would be as nice as mamma."

"Then why have you come to school?" inquired Harriet.

"Because"—"because father and mamma have to go away," I was going to say, when suddenly the full meaning of the words seemed to rush over me. A strange giddy feeling made me shut my eyes and I caught hold of Harriet's arm.

"What's the matter?" she said wonderingly, as I opened my eyes and looked at her again.

"I'd rather not talk about mamma just now," I said. "I'll tell you afterwards."

"Up in our room," said Harriet, "oh yes, that'll be jolly. We've got all sorts of dodges."

But before she had time to explain more, or I to ask her why "dodges"—I knew the meaning of the word from Haddie—were required, a bell rang loudly.

Instantly the hubbub ceased, and there began a sort of silent scramble — the elder girls collecting books and papers and hurrying to their places; the younger ones rushing upstairs to the other schoolroom, I following.

In a few minutes we were all seated round the long tables. It was a sewing afternoon, and to my great delight I saw that Miss Fenmore, the pretty governess whom I had taken such a fancy to, though I had not yet spoken to her, was now in Miss Broom's place.

Mamma had provided me with both plain work and a little simple fancy work, but as my things were not yet unpacked, I had neither with me, and I sat feeling awkward and ashamed, seeing all the others busily preparing for business.

"Have you no work, my dear?" said Miss Fenmore gently. It was the first kind speech I had had from a governess.

"It isn't unpacked," I said, feeling my cheeks grow red, I did not know why.

Miss Fenmore hesitated for a moment. Then she took out a stocking — or rather the beginning of one on knitting-needles.

"Can you knit?" she asked.

"I can knit plain — plain and purl — just straight on," I said. "But I've never done it round like that."

"Never mind, you will learn easily, as you know how to knit. Come and sit beside me, so that I can watch you."

She made the girls sit a little more closely, making a place for me beside her, and I would have been quite happy had I not seen a cross expression on several faces, and heard murmurs of "favouring," "spoilt pet," and so on.

Miss Fenmore, if *she* heard, took no notice. And in a few moments all was in order. We read aloud in turns — the book was supposed to be a story-book, but it seemed to me very dull, though the fault may have lain in the uninteresting way the girls read, and the constant change of voices, as no one read more than two pages at a time. I left off trying to listen and gave my whole attention to my knitting, encouraged by Miss Fenmore's whispered "very nice — a little looser," or "won't it be nice to knit socks for your father or brother, if you have a brother?"

I nodded with a smile. I was burning to tell her everything. Already I felt that I loved her dearly

—her voice was as sweet as her face. Yet there were tones in the former and lines in the latter telling of much sorrow and suffering, young as she was. I was far too much of a child to understand this. I only felt vaguely that there was something about her which reminded me of mamma as she had looked these last few weeks.

And my heart was won.

CHAPTER VII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

AFTER that first day at Green Bank, the remembrance of things in detail is not so clear to me.

To begin with, the life was very monotonous. Except for the different lessons, one day passed much like another, the principal variety being the coming of Sunday and the two weekly half-holidays — Wednesday and Saturday. But to me the half-holidays brought no pleasure. I think I disliked them more than lesson days, and most certainly I disliked Sundays most of all.

Looking back now, I think my whole nature and character must have gone through some curious changes in these first weeks at school. I grew older very rapidly.

There first came by degrees the great *disappointment* of it all — for though I am anxious not to exaggerate anything, it was a bewildering "disillusionment" to me. Nobody and nothing were

what I had imagined they would be. Straight out of my sheltered home, where every thought and tone and word were full of love, I was tossed into this world of school, where, though no doubt there were kind hearts and nice natures as there are everywhere, the whole feeling was different. Even the good-nature was rough and unrefined — the tones of voice, the ways of moving about, the readiness to squabble, though very likely it was more a kind of bluster than anything worse, all startled and astounded me, as I gradually awoke from my dream of the delights of being at school surrounded by companions.

And there was really a prejudice against me, both among teachers and pupils. A story had got about that my family was very, very poor, that father had had to go abroad on this account, and that my schooling was to be paid for out of charity. So even my gentleness, my soft way of speaking, the surprise I was too innocent to conceal at much that I saw, were all put down to my "giving myself airs." And I daresay the very efforts I made to please those about me and to gain their affection did more harm than good. Because I clung more or less to Harriet Smith, my room-mate, and the nearest to me

in age, I was called a little sneak, trying to get all I could "out of her," as she was such a rich little girl.

I overheard these remarks once or twice, but it was not for some time that I in the least knew what they meant, and so I daresay the coarse-minded girls who made them thought all the worse of me because I did not resent them and just went quietly on my own way.

What I did want from Harriet was sympathy; and when she was in the humour to pay attention to me, she did give me as much as it was in her to give.

I shall never forget the real kindness she and Emma too showed me that first night at Green Bank, when a great blow fell on me after we went upstairs to go to bed.

Some one had unpacked my things. My night-dress was lying on the bed, my brushes and sponges were in their places, and when I opened the very small chest of drawers I saw familiar things neatly arranged in them. But there seemed so few — and in the bottom drawer only one frock, and that my oldest one, not the pretty new one mamma had got me for Sundays or any special occasion.

"Where can all my other things be?" I said to Harriet, who was greatly interested in my possessions.

"What more have you?" she said, peering over my shoulder.

I named several.

"And all my other things," I went on, "not clothes, I don't mean, but my workbox and my new writing-desk, and the picture of father and mamma and Haddie" — it was before the days of "carte-de-visite" or "cabinet" photographs; this picture was what was called a "daguerreotype" on glass, and had been taken on purpose for me at some expense — "and my china dog and the rabbits, and my scraps of silk, and all my puzzles, and, and ——" I stopped short, out of breath with bewilderment. "Can they be all together for me to unpack myself?" I said.

Emma, the most experienced of the three, shook her head.

"I'm afraid," she was beginning, when the door opened, and Miss Broom's face appeared.

"Young ladies," she said, "I cannot have this. No talking after the last bell has rung. My dear Miss Smith, you are not usually so forgetful. If

it is *you*, Miss Marchant, it is a very bad beginning, disobedience the very first evening."

"She didn't know," said both the girls. "It isn't her fault." "And if she had known," Harriet went on, "she couldn't have helped it. Miss Broom, somebody's took such lots of her things. Tell her, Gerry."

Under her protection I repeated the list of missing articles, but before I had got to the end the governess interrupted me.

"You are a most impertinent child," she said, "to say such a thing. There are no thieves at Green Bank — what a mind you must have! Your things are safely packed away. Such as you really need you shall have from time to time as I or Miss Aspinall think fit. The frock you have on must be kept as your best one, and you must wear the brown check every day. You have far too many clothes — absurd extravagance — no wonder ——" but here she had the sense to stop short.

I did not care so much about my clothes.

"It's the other things I mind," I began, but Miss Broom, who was already at the door, again interrupted.

"Nonsense," she said. "We cannot have the rooms littered with rubbish. Miss Aspinall left

it to me. You may have your Biblical dissected maps on Sundays, and perhaps some of the other puzzles during the Christmas holidays, but young ladies do not come to school to amuse themselves, but to work hard at their lessons."

I dared not say anything more. There may have been some reason in putting away a certain number of my treasures, for dear mamma, in her wish to do all she possibly could for my happiness, had very probably sent more things with me than was advisable. But I was not a silly spoilt child; I had always been taught to be reasonable, and I would have given in quite cheerfully if Miss Broom had put it before me in any kindly way.

I was not left quite without defence, however.

"I don't see but what you might let her have some things out," said Emma. "Harry and I have. Look at the mantelpiece — the china figures and the Swiss châlets are our ornaments, and there's quite room for some more."

But Miss Broom was by this time at the door, which shut after her sharply without her saying another word.

"Horrid old cat," said both the Smiths.

I said nothing, for if I had I knew I should

have burst into tears. But after I was ready for bed and had said my prayers, I could not help the one bitter complaint.

"I wouldn't mind anything else if only she'd let me have papa and mamma's picture," I said.

"*Of course* you should have that," said Emma. "I'm sure Miss Ledbury would let you have it. I think even Miss Aspinall would. Don't be unhappy, Gerry, I'll see if I can't do something for you to-morrow."

And with this consolation I fell asleep. Nor did Emma forget her promise. The next day I found my daguerreotype installed on the mantelpiece, where it stayed all the time I was at school.

My happiest days were those of our French lessons, for then Miss Fenmore was the teacher. She spoke French very well, and she was most kind and patient. Yet for some reason or other she was not much liked in the school. There was a prejudice against her as there was against me: partly, because she did not belong to that part of the country, she was said to "give herself airs"; partly, I think, because she was quiet and rather reserved; partly, I am afraid, because some of the elder girls were jealous of her extreme loveliness. She was as kind

to me as she dared to be, but I had no lessons from her except French, and she has since told me that she did not venture to show me anything like partiality, as it would only have made my life still harder and lonelier.

The remembrances which stand out the most clearly in my mind will give a fair idea of my time at Green Bank. The next great trouble I had came on my first Sunday there.

It had been settled that I was to write to mamma once a week — by every mail, that is to say. The usual day for writing home was Wednesday, the half-holiday, but as the South American mail left England that very day, mamma had arranged with Miss Ledbury that I should be allowed to add a little on Sundays to my letter, as otherwise my news would be a whole week late before it left.

So on the first Sunday afternoon I got out my writing things with great satisfaction, and when Miss Broom asked me what I was going to do, I was pleased to be able to reply that Miss Ledbury had given leave for a Sunday letter. Miss Broom said something to Miss Aspinall, but though they both looked very disapproving, they said no more.

I wrote a long letter. This time, of course, it had

to be a complete one, as I had only come to Green Bank on the Thursday. I poured out my heart to mamma, but yet, looking back now and recalling, as I know I can, pretty correctly, all I said, I do not think it was exaggerated or wrong. I tried to write cheerfully, for childish as I was in many ways, I did understand that it would make mamma miserable to think I was unhappy.

I was just closing the envelope when Miss Broom entered the room.

"What are you doing?" she said. "Dear, dear, you don't mean to say you have been all this afternoon writing that letter? What a waste of time! No, no, you must not do that. Miss Ledbury will seal it."

"It doesn't need sealing," I replied. "It is a gumming-down envelope."

But she had come close to me, and drew it out of my hand.

"No letters leave this house without being first read by Miss Ledbury or Miss Aspinall," she said. "Why do you stare so? It is the rule at every school," and so in those days I suppose it was. "If you have written nothing you should not, you have no reason to dread its being seen."

"Yes, I have," I replied indignantly. Even the three or four days I had been at school had made me months older. "I have," I repeated. "Nobody would say to strangers all they'd say to their own mamma."

I felt my face growing very red; I pulled the letter out of the envelope and began to tear it across. But Miss Broom's strong hands caught hold of mine.

"You are a very naughty girl," she said, "a very naughty girl indeed. I saw at once how spoilt and self-willed you were, but I never could have believed you would dare to give way to such violent temper."

She dragged the letter out of my fingers — indeed, I was too proud to struggle with her — and left the room. I sat there in a sort of stupefied indifference. That day had been the worst I had had. There was not the interest of lessons, nor the daily bustle which had always something enlivening about it. It was so dull, and oh, so different from home! The home-sickness which I was too ignorant to give a name to began to come over me with strides; but for my letter to mamma I felt as if I could not have lived through that afternoon. For even the Smiths were away. They were what was called "weekly

boarders," going home every Saturday at noon and staying till Monday morning.

The indifference did not last long. Gradually both it and the indignation broke down. I laid my head on the table before me and burst into convulsive crying.

I do not think I cried loudly. I only remember the terrible sort of shaking that went through me — I had never felt anything like it in my life — and I remember trying to choke down my sobs for fear of Miss Broom hearing me and coming back.

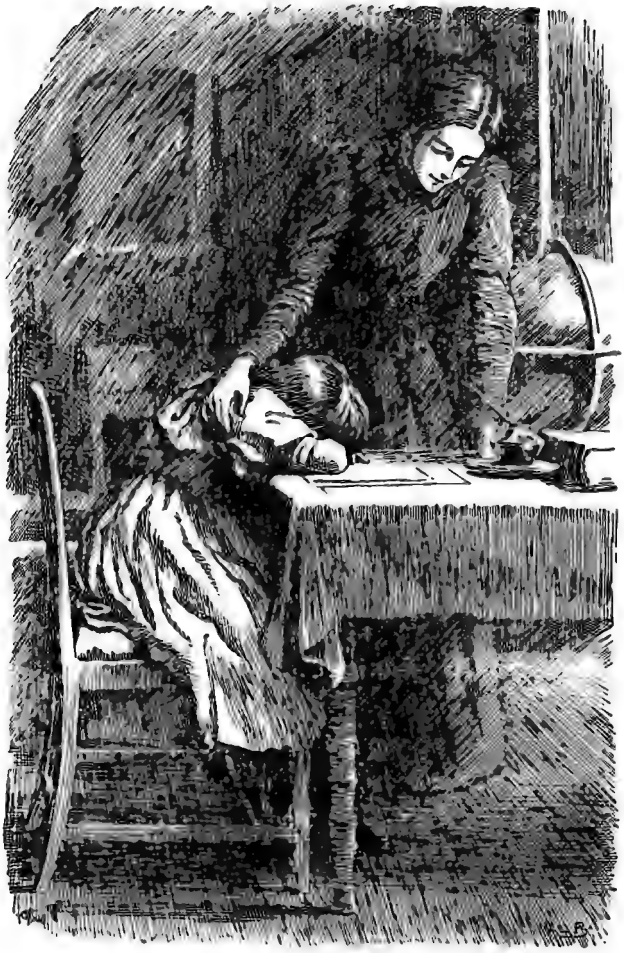
Some one opened the door and looked in. I tried to be perfectly quiet. But the some one, whoever it was, had seen and perhaps heard me, for she came forward, and in another moment I felt an arm steal gently round me, while a kind voice said softly, very softly,

"My poor little girl, what *is* the matter?" and looking up, I saw that the new-comer was Miss Fenmore.

"Oh," I said through my tears, "it's my letter, and she's taken it away — that horrid, *horrid* Miss Broom."

And I told her the whole story.

Miss Fenmore was very wise as well as kind. I have often wondered how she had learnt so much



"MY POOR LITTLE GIRL, WHAT *is* THE MATTER?" — c. vii. p. 108.

self-control in her short life, for though she then seemed quite "old" to me, I now know she cannot have been more than eighteen or nineteen. But she had had a sad life — that of an orphan since childhood. I suppose sorrow had done the work of years in her case — work that is indeed often not done at all! For she had a character which was good soil for all discipline. She was naturally so sweet and joyous — she seemed born with rose-coloured spectacles.

"Dear child," she said, "try not to take this so much to heart. I daresay your letter will be sent just as it is. Miss Broom is sure to apply to Miss Aspinall, perhaps to Miss Ledbury. And Miss Ledbury is really kind, and she must have had great experience in such things."

But the last words were spoken with more hesitation. Miss Fenmore knew that the class of children composing Miss Ledbury's school had not had a home like mine.

Suddenly she started up — steps were coming along the passage.

"I must not talk to you any more just now," she said, "I came to fetch a book."

After all, the steps did not come to the school-

room. So after sitting there a little longer, somewhat comforted by the young governess's words, I went up to my own room, where I bathed my eyes and smoothed my hair, mindful of Haddie's warning — not to get the name of a cry-baby!

Late that evening, after tea, I was sent for to Miss Ledbury in the drawing-room. It was a very rainy night, so only a few of the elder girls had gone to church. Miss Ledbury herself suffered sadly from asthma, and could never go out in bad weather. This was the first time I had seen her to speak to since I came.

I was still too unhappy to feel very frightened, and I was not naturally shy, though I seemed so, owing to my difficulty in expressing myself. And there was something about the old lady's manner, gentle though she was, which added to my constraint. I have no doubt she found me very dull and stupid, and it must have been disappointing, for she did mean to be kind.

She spoke to me about my letter which she had read, according to her rule, to which she said she could make no exceptions. I did not clearly understand what she meant, so I just replied "No, ma'am," and "Yes, ma'am." She said the letter should be

sent as it was, but she gave me advice for the future which in some ways was very good. Could I not content myself with writing about my own affairs — my lessons, the books I was reading, and so on? What was the use of telling mamma that I did not like Miss Aspinall, and that I could not bear Miss Broom? Would it please mamma, or would it make school-life any happier for me to take up such prejudices? These ladies were my teachers and I must respect them. How could I tell at the end of three days if I should like them or not?

I felt I *could* tell, but I did not dare to say so. All I longed for was to get away. So when the old lady went on putting words into my mouth, as it were, about being wiser for the future, and not touchy and fanciful, and so on, I agreed with her and said "No, ma'am" and "Yes, ma'am" a few more times, meekly enough. Then she kissed me, and again I felt that she meant to be kind and that it was wrong of me to disappoint her, but somehow I could not help it. And I went upstairs to bed feeling more lonely than ever, now that I quite understood that my letters to mamma must never be anything more than I might write to a stranger — a mere mockery, in short.

There was but one person I felt that I could

confide in. That was Miss Fenmore. But the days went on and she seemed to take less instead of more notice of me. I did not understand that her position, poor girl, was much more difficult than mine. If she had seemed to pet me or make much of me it would only have made Miss Broom still more severe to me, and angry with her. For, as was scarcely to be wondered at, Miss Broom was very indignant indeed at the way I had spoken of her in my letter to mamma. And Miss Fenmore was entirely at that time dependent upon her position at Green Bank. She had no home, and if she brought displeasure upon herself at Miss Ledbury's her future would look very dark indeed.

Yet she was far from selfish. Her caution was quite as much for my sake as for her own.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NOBODY — *NOBODY*."

THE history of that first week might stand for the history of several months at Green Bank. That is why I have related it as clearly as possible. In one sense I suppose people would say my life grew easier to me, that is to say I got more accustomed to it, but with the "growing accustomed," increased the loss of hope and spring, so I doubt if time did bring any real improvement.

I became very dull and silent. I seemed to be losing the power of complaining, or even of wishing for sympathy. I took some interest in my lessons, and almost the only pleasure I had was when I got praise for them. But that did not often happen, not as often as it should have done, I really believe. For the prejudice against me on the part of the upper teachers did not wear off. And I can see now that I must have been a disagreeable child.

Nor did I win more liking among my companions.

They gradually came to treat me with a sort of indifferent contempt.

"It's only that stupid child," I would hear said when I came into the room.

The Christmas holidays came and went, without much improving matters. I spent them at school with one or two other pupils, much older than I. Miss Broom went away, and we were under Miss Aspinall's charge, for Miss Ledbury had caught a bad cold and her niece would not leave her. I preferred Miss Aspinall to Miss Broom certainly, but I had half hoped that Miss Fenmore would have stayed. She too went away, however, having got a "holiday engagement," which she was very glad of she told me when she bade me good-bye. I did not understand what she meant, beyond hearing that she was glad to go, so I said nothing about being sorry.

"She doesn't care for me," I thought.

I saw nothing of Haddie, though he wrote that he was very happy spending the holidays at the house of one of his schoolfellows, and I was glad of this, even while feeling so utterly deserted myself.

It was very, very dull, but I felt as if I did not mind. Even mamma's letters once a fortnight gave me only a kind of tantalising pleasure, for I knew I

dared not *really* answer them. The only thing I felt glad of was that she did not know how lonely and unhappy I was, and that she never would do so till the day — the day which I could scarcely believe would ever, *ever* come — when I should see her again, and feel her arms round me, and know that all the misery and loneliness were over!

Some new pupils came after the Christmas holidays, and one or two of the elder girls did not return. But the new boarders were older than I and took no notice of me, so their coming made no difference. One event, however, did interest me — that was the appearance at certain classes two or three times a week of a very sweet-looking little girl about my own age. She was pretty and very nicely dressed, though by no means showily, and her tone of voice and way of speaking were different from those of most of my companions. I wished she had come altogether, and then I might have made friends with her. "Only," I said to myself unselfishly, "she would most likely be as unhappy as I am, so I shouldn't wish for it."

One of the classes she came to was the French one — the class which, as I have said, Miss Fenmore taught. And Miss Fenmore seemed to know her,

for she called her by her Christian name — "Myra." The first time I heard it I felt quite puzzled. I knew I had heard it before, though I could not remember where or when, except that it was not very long ago. And when I heard her last name, "Raby" — "Miss Raby" one of the other teachers called her — and put the two together — "Myra Raby" — I felt more and more certain I had heard them spoken of before, though I was equally certain I had never seen the little girl herself.

I might have asked Miss Fenmore about her, but it did not enter into my head to do so: that was one of my odd childish ways. And it was partly, too, that I was growing more and more reserved and silent. Even to Harriet Smith I did not talk half as much as at first, and she used to tell me I was growing sulky.

I took great interest in watching for Myra's appearance. I daresay if I could make a picture of her now she would seem a quaint old-fashioned little figure to you, but to me she seemed perfectly lovely. She had pretty brown hair, falling in ringlets round her delicate little face; her eyes were gray, very soft and gentle, and she had a dear little rosebud of a mouth. She was generally dressed in pale gray

merino or cashmere, with white lace frilled round the neck and short sleeves — all little girls wore short sleeves then, even in winter; and once when I caught a glimpse of her getting into a carriage which was waiting for her at the door, I was lost in admiration of her dark green cloth pelisse trimmed with chinchilla fur.

"She must be somebody very rich and grand," I thought. But I had no opportunity of getting to know more of her, than a nice little smile or a word or two of thanks if I passed her a book at the class or happened to sit next her. For she always left immediately after the lesson was over.

Up to Easter she came regularly. Then we had three weeks' holidays, and as before, Miss Fenmore went away. She was pleased to go, but when she said good-bye to me I thought she looked sad, and she called me "my poor little girl."

"Why do you say that?" I asked her. She smiled and answered that she did not quite know; she thought I looked dull, and she wished I were going too.

"Are you less unhappy than when you first came to school?" she said, looking at me rather earnestly. It was very seldom she had an opportunity of speaking to me alone.

"No," I replied, "I'm much unhappier when I think about it. But I'm getting not to think, so I don't care."

She looked still graver at this. I fancy she saw that what I said was true. I was growing dulled and stupefied, as it were, for want of any one to sympathise with me or draw me out, though I did not know quite how to put this in words. As I have said before, I was not a child with much power of expression.

Miss Fenmore kissed me, but she sighed as she did so.

"I wish ——" she began, but then she stopped. "When I come back after Easter," she said more cheerfully, "I hope I may somehow manage to see more of you, dear Geraldine."

"Thank you," I answered. I daresay my voice did not sound as if I did thank her or as if I cared, though in my heart I was pleased, and often thought of what she had said during the holidays, which I found even duller than the Christmas ones had been.

They came to an end at last, however, but among the returning governesses and pupils there was no Miss Fenmore. Nor did Myra Raby come again to the classes she used to attend. I wondered to my-

self why it was so, but for some time I knew nothing about Miss Fenmore, and in the queer silent way which was becoming my habit I did not ask. At last one day a new governess made her appearance, and then I overheard some of the girls saying she was to take Miss Fenmore's place. A sort of choke came into my throat, and for the first time I realised that I *had* been looking forward to the pretty young governess's return.

I do not remember anything special happening for some time after that. I suppose Easter must have been early that year, for when the events occurred which I am now going to relate, it was still cold and wintry weather — very rainy at least, and Mexington was always terribly gloomy in rainy weather. It seems a long stretch to look back upon — those weeks of the greatest loneliness I had yet known — but in reality I do not think it could have been more than three or four.

I continued to work steadily — even hard — at my lessons. I knew that it would please mamma, and I had a vague feeling that somehow my getting on fast might shorten the time of our separation, though I could not have said why. I was really interested in some of my lessons, and anxious to do well even

in those I did not like. But I was not quick or clever, and often, very often, my hesitation in expressing myself made me seem far less intelligent than I actually was. Still I generally got good marks, especially for *written* tasks, for the teachers, though hard and strict, were not unprincipled. They did not like me, but they were fair on the whole, I think.

Unluckily, however, about this time I got a bad cold. I was not seriously ill, but it hung about me for some time and made me feel very dull and stupid. I think, too, it must have made me a little deaf, though I did not know it at the time. I began to get on less well at lessons, very often making mistakes and replying at random, for which I was scolded as if I did it out of carelessness.

And though I tried more and more to prepare my lessons perfectly, things grew worse and worse.

At last one day they came to a point. I forget what the lesson was, and it does not matter, but every time a question came to me I answered wrongly. Once or twice I did not hear, and when I said so, Miss Broom, whose class it was, was angry, and said I was talking nonsense. It ended

in my bursting into tears, which I had never done before in public since I had been at Green Bank.

Miss Broom was very annoyed. She said a great deal to me which between my tears and my deafness I did not hear, and at last she must have ordered me to go up to my room, for her tone grew more and more angry.

"Do you mean to defy me?" she said, so loud that I heard her plainly.

I stared, and I do not know what would have happened if Harriet Smith, who was near me, had not started up in her good-natured way.

"She doesn't hear; she's crying so," she said. "Gerry, dear, Miss Broom says you're to go up to your room."

I was nothing loth. I got up from my seat and made my way more by feeling than seeing — so blinded was I by crying — to the door, and upstairs.

Arrived there, I flung myself on to the end of my bed. It was cold, and outside it was raining, raining — it seems to me now that it never left off raining at Mexington that spring; the sky, if I had looked out of the window, was one dull gray sheet. But I seemed to care for nothing — just at first the comfort of being able to cry with no one to look

at me was all I wanted. So I lay there sobbing, though not loudly.

After some little time had passed the downstairs bell rang — it was afternoon, and the bell meant, I knew, preparation for tea. So I was not very surprised when the door opened and Emma and Harriet came in — they were both kind, Harriet especially, though her kindness was chiefly shown by loud abuse of Miss Broom.

"You'd better take care, Harry," said her sister at last, "or you'll be getting into disgrace yourself, which certainly won't do Gerry any good. Do be quick and make yourself tidy, the tea-bell will be ringing in a moment. Hadn't you better wash your face and brush your hair, Gerry — you do look such a figure."

"I can't go down unless Miss Broom says I may," I replied, "and I don't want any tea," though in my heart I knew I was feeling hungry. Much crying often makes children hungry; they are not like grown-up people.

"Oh, nonsense," said Emma. "You'd feel ever so much better if you had some tea. What *I* think you're so silly for is *minding* — why need you care what that old Broom says? She daren't beat you

or starve you, and once you're at home again you can snap your fingers at school and governesses and ——"

Here Harriet said something to her sister in a low voice which I did not hear. It made Emma stop.

"Oh, well, I can't help it," she said, or something of that kind. "It doesn't do any good to cry like that, whatever troubles you have," she went on.

I got up slowly and tried to wash away some of the traces of my tears by plunging my face in cold water. Then Harriet helped me to smooth my hair and make myself look neat. Emma's words had had the effect of making me resolve to cry no more if I could help it. And a moment or two later I was glad I had followed her advice, for one of the elder girls came to our room with a message to say that I was to go down to tea, and after tea I was to stay behind in the dining-room as Miss Aspinall wished to speak to me.

"Very well," I said. But the moment the other girl had gone both Emma and Harriet began again.

"That horrid old Broom," said Harriet, "just fancy her complaining to Miss Aspinall."

And "Promise me, Gerry," said Emma, "not to mind what she says, and whatever you do, don't cry.

There's nothing vexes old Broom so much as seeing we don't care — mean old cat."

I could scarcely help laughing, my spirits had got up a little — that is to say, I felt more angry than sad now. I felt as if I really did *not* much care what was said to me.

And I drank my tea and ate my slices of thick bread and butter with a good appetite, though I saw Miss Broom watching me from her end of the table; and when I had finished I felt, as Emma had said I should, "ever so much better" — that is to say, no longer in the least inclined to cry.

Nor did I feel nervous or frightened when Miss Aspinall — all the others having gone — seated herself in front of me and began her talk. It began quite differently from what I had expected. She was a good woman, and not nearly so bad-tempered as Miss Broom, though hard and cold, and I am sure she meant to do me good. She talked about how changed I had been of late, my lessons so much less well done, and how careless and inattentive I seemed. There was some truth in it. I knew my lessons had not been so well done, but I also knew I had not been careless or inattentive.

"And worst of all," continued the governess, "you

have got into such a habit of making excuses that it really amounts to telling untruths. Several times, Miss Broom tells me, you have done a wrong lesson or not done one at all, and you have maintained to her that you had not been told what you *had* been told — there was something about your French poetry yesterday, which you *must* have known you were to learn. Miss Broom says you positively denied it."

I was getting very angry now — I had wanted to say I was sorry about my lessons, but now that I was accused of not speaking the truth I felt nothing but anger.

"I never tell stories," I said very loudly; "and if Miss Broom says I do, I'll write to mamma and tell her. I *won't* stay here if you say such things to me."

Miss Aspinall was quite startled; she had never seen me in a passion before, for I was usually considered in the school as sulky rather than violent-tempered. For a moment or two she stared, too astonished to speak. Then,

"Go back to your room," she said. "I am sorry to say I must lay this before Miss Ledbury."

I got up from my seat — Miss Aspinall had not kept me standing — and went upstairs again to my

room, where I stayed for the rest of the evening, my supper — a cup of milk and a piece of dry bread — being brought me by a servant, and with it a message that I was to undress and go to bed, which I was not sorry to do.

I lay there, not asleep, and still burning with indignation, when Harriet came up to bed. She had not been told not to speak to me, very likely the teachers thought I would be asleep, and she was very curious to know what had passed. I told her all. She was very sympathising, but at the same time she thought it a pity I had lost my temper with Miss Aspinall.

"I don't know how you'll get on now," she said, "with both her and Miss Broom so against you. You should just not have minded — like Emma said."

"Not mind her saying I told stories!" I burst out. Harriet did not seem to think there was anything specially annoying in that. "Well," I went on, "*I* mind it, whether you do or not. And I'm *going* to mind it. I shall write to mamma and tell her I can't stay here any more, and I'm sure when she hears it she'll do *something*. She won't let me stay here. Or — or — perhaps father will fix to come home again and not stay as long as two years there."

"I don't think he'll do that," said Harriet mysteriously.

"What do you mean? What do you know about it?" I asked, for something in her voice struck me.

"Oh, nothing — I shouldn't have said it — it was only something I heard," she replied, looking rather confused.

"Something you heard," *I* repeated, starting up in bed and catching hold of her. "Then you *must* tell me. Do you mean there's been letters or news about father and mamma that I don't know about?"

"No, no," said Harriet. "Of course not."

"Then what do you mean? You shall tell me — if you don't," I went on, more and more excitedly, "I'll —" I hesitated — "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go straight downstairs, just as I am, in my nightgown, to Miss Ledbury herself, and tell her what you've said. I don't care if she beats me, I don't care what she does, but I *will* know."

Harriet tried to pull herself away.

"What a horrid temper you're getting, Gerry," she said complainingly. "Just when I hurried up to bed as quick as I could to talk to you. It's nothing, I tell you — only something I heard at home, and Emma said I wasn't ever to tell it you."

I clutched her more firmly.

"You shall tell me, or I'll do what I said."

Harriet looked really frightened.

"You'll not tell Emma, then? You promise?"

I nodded. "I promise."

"Well, then, it was only one day — papa was talking about somebody going to South America, and I said that was where your papa and mamma had gone, and papa asked your name, and then he said he had seen your papa at the bank, and it was a pity he hadn't been content to stay there. It was such a bad climate where he'd gone — lots of people got ill and died there, unless they were rich enough to live out of the town, and he didn't suppose any one who'd only been a clerk in the bank here would be that. And Emma said, couldn't your papa and mamma come back if they got ill, and he said if they waited till then it would be rather too late. There's some fever people get there, that comes all of a sudden. And besides that, your papa must have promised he'd stay two years — they always do."

As she went on, my heart fell lower and lower — for a moment or two I could not speak. All sorts of dreadful fears and imaginings began to

fill my mind; perhaps my parents had already got that terrible illness Harriet spoke of, perhaps one or both of them had already died. I could have screamed aloud. I felt I could not bear it — I must write to mamma a letter that nobody should read. I must see somebody who would tell me the truth — Haddie, perhaps, knew more than I did. If I could go to him! But I had no money and no idea of the way, and Miss Aspinall would never, *never* let me even write to ask him. Besides, I was in disgrace, very likely they would not believe me if I told them why I was so miserable; they had already said I told stories, and then I must not get Harriet into trouble.

What *should* I do? If only Miss Fenmore had still been there, I felt she would have been sorry for me, but there was nobody — *nobody.*

I turned my face away from my little companion, and buried it in the pillow. Harriet grew frightened.

"What are you doing, Gerry?" she said. "Why don't you speak? Are you going to sleep or are you crying? Very likely your papa and mamma won't get that illness. I wish I hadn't told you."

"Never mind," I said. "I'm going to sleep."

"And you won't tell Emma?" Harriet repeated.

"Of course not — don't you believe my word? Do you too think that I tell stories?"

I tried to get rid of my misery by letting myself grow angry.

"You're very cross," said Harriet; but all the same I think she understood me better than she could express, for she kissed me and said, "Do go to sleep — don't be so unhappy."

CHAPTER IX.

OUT IN THE RAIN.

It would be an exaggeration to say that I did not sleep that night. Children often sleep very heavily when they are specially unhappy, and I was unhappy enough, even before Harriet's telling me what she had heard. But though I did sleep, I shall never forget that night. My dreams were so miserable, and when I awoke — very early in the morning — I could scarcely separate them from real things. It was actually not so bad when I was quite awake, for then I set myself thoroughly to think it all over.

I could not bear it — I could not go on without knowing if it was true about father and mamma. I could not bear my life at school, if the looking forward to being with them again, before *very* long, was to be taken from me. I must write a letter to mamma that no one would see; but first — yes, first I must know how much was true. Whom could

I ask? Haddie? Perhaps he knew no more than I did, and it was just as difficult to write to him as to mamma. Then suddenly another thought struck me — Mrs. Selwood, old Mrs. Selwood, if I could but see her. Perhaps if I wrote to her she would come to see me; mamma always said she was very kind, though I know she did not care much for children, especially little girls. Still I thought I would try, though it would be difficult, for I should not like Miss Ledbury to know I had written to Mrs. Selwood secretly. She would be so angry, and I did not want to make Miss Ledbury angry. She was much nicer than the others. Once or twice the idea came to me of going straight to her and telling her how miserable I was, but that would bring in Harriet, and oh, how furious the other governesses would be! No, I would try to write to Mrs. Selwood — only, I did not know her address. I only knew the name of her house — Fernley — that would not be enough, at least I feared not. I would try to find out; perhaps Harriet could ask some one when she went home.

My spirits rose a little with all this planning. I am afraid that the life I led was beginning to make

me unchildlike and concealed in my ways. I enjoyed the feeling of having a secret and, so to say, outwitting my teachers, particularly Miss Broom. So, though I was looking pale and my eyes were still very swollen, I think Harriet was surprised, and certainly very glad, to find that I was not very miserable or upset.

A message was sent up to say I was to go down to breakfast with the others. And after prayers and breakfast were over I went into the schoolroom as usual.

That morning did not pass badly; it happened to be a day for lessons I got on well with — written ones principally, and reading aloud. So I got into no fresh disgrace. It was a very rainy day, there was no question of going out, and I was sent to practise at twelve o'clock till the dressing-bell rang for the early dinner. That was to keep me away from the other girls.

As soon as dinner was over Miss Broom came to me with a French poetry book in her hand.

"This is the poem you should have learnt yesterday," she said, "though you denied having been told so. Miss Aspinall desires you to take it upstairs to your room and learn it, as you can do per-

fectly, if you choose, by three o'clock. Then you are to come downstairs to the drawing-room, where you will find her."

"Very well," I said, as I took the book, "I will learn it."

They were going to let me off rather easily, I thought, and possibly, just *possibly*, if Miss Ledbury was in the drawing-room too and seemed kind, I might ask her to give me leave to write to Mrs. Selwood just to say how very much I would like to see her, and then if I *did* see her I could tell her what Harriet had said, without risking getting Harriet into trouble.

So I set to work at my French poetry with good will, and long before three o'clock I had learnt it perfectly. There was a clock on the landing half-way down the staircase which struck the quarters and half-hours. I heard the quarter to three strike and then I read the poem right through six times, and after that, closing the book, I said it aloud to myself without one mistake, and then just as the clock began "*burr*-ing" before striking the hour I made my way quietly down to the drawing-room.

I tapped at the door.

"Come in," said Miss Aspinall.

She was standing beside Miss Ledbury, who was sitting in an arm-chair near the fire. She looked very pale, her face nearly as white as her hair, and it made me feel sorry, so that I stared at her and forgot to curtsey as we always were expected to do on entering a room where any of the governesses were.

"Do you not see Miss Ledbury?" said Miss Aspinall sharply. I felt my cheeks get red, and I turned back towards the door to make my curtsey.

"I — I forgot," I said, and before Miss Aspinall had time to speak again, the old lady held out her hand.

"You must try to be more thoughtful," she said, but her voice was gentle. "Now give me your book," she went on, "I want to hear your French verses myself."

I handed her the book, which was open at the place. I felt very glad I had learnt the poetry so well, as I wished to please Miss Ledbury.

"Begin, my dear," she said.

I did so, repeating the six or eight verses without any mistake or hesitation.

Miss Ledbury seemed pleased and relieved.

"Very well said — now, my dear child, that shows that you can learn well when you try."

"Of course she can," said Miss Aspinall.

"But more important than learning your lessons well," continued Miss Ledbury, "is to be perfectly truthful and honest. What has distressed me, Geraldine, has been to hear that when — as may happen to any child — you have forgotten a lesson, or learnt it imperfectly, instead of at once owning your fault, you have tried to screen yourself behind insincere excuses. That was the case about these very verses, was it not, Miss Aspinall?" (Miss Ledbury always called her niece "Miss Aspinall" before any of us.)

"It was," replied Miss Aspinall. "Miss Broom will tell you all the particulars," and as she spoke Miss Broom came in.

Miss Ledbury turned to her.

"I wish you to state exactly what you have had to complain of in Geraldine Le Marchant," she said. And Miss Broom, with a far from amiable expression, repeated the whole — my carelessness and ill-prepared lessons for some time past, the frequent excuses I made, saying that she had not told me what she certainly *had* told me, my forgetting my

French poetry altogether, and persisting in denying that it had been given out.

I did not hear clearly all she said, but she raised her voice at the end, and I caught her last words. I felt again a sort of fury at her, and I gave up all idea of confiding in Miss Ledbury, or of trying to please any one.

Miss Ledbury seemed nervous.

"Geraldine has said her French poetry perfectly," she said. "I think she has taken pains to learn it well."

"It is some time since she has said any lesson perfectly to *me*, I am sorry to say," snapped Miss Broom.

Miss Ledbury handed her the book.

"You can judge for yourself," she said. "Repeat the verses to Miss Broom, Geraldine."

Then a strange thing happened. I really wanted to say the poetry well, partly out of pride, partly because again something in Miss Ledbury's manner made me feel gentler, but as I opened my mouth to begin, the words entirely left my memory. I looked up — possibly a little help, a syllable just to start me, would have set me right, but instead of that I saw Miss Broom's half-mocking, half-angry face, and Miss Aspinall's cold hard eyes. Miss Ledbury I did

not look at. In reality I think both she and Miss Aspinall were afraid of Miss Broom. I do not think Miss Aspinall was as hard as she seemed.

I drew a long breath — no, it was no use. I could not recall one word.

"I've forgotten it," I said.

Miss Aspinall gave an exclamation — Miss Ledbury looked at me with reproach. Both believed that I was not speaking the truth, and that I had determined not to say the verses to Miss Broom.

"Impossible," said Miss Aspinall.

"Geraldine," said Miss Ledbury sadly but sternly, "do not make me distrust you."

I grew stony. Now I did not care. Even Miss Ledbury doubted my word. I almost think if the verses had come back to me then, I would not have said them. I stood there, dull and stupid and obstinate, though a perfect fire was raging inside me.

"Geraldine," said Miss Ledbury again, still more sadly and sternly.

I was only a child, and I was almost exhausted by all I had gone through. Even my pride gave way. I forgot all that Emma and Harriet had said about not crying, and, half turning away from the three before me, I burst into a loud fit of tears and sobbing.

Miss Ledbury glanced at her niece. I think the old lady had hard work to keep herself from some impulsive kind action, but I suppose she would have thought it wrong. But Miss Aspinall came towards me, and placed her arm on my shoulders.

"Geraldine," she said, and her voice was not unkind, "I beg you to try to master this naughty obstinate spirit. Say the verses again, and all may be well."

"No, no," I cried. "I can't, I can't. It is true that I've forgotten them, and if I could say them I wouldn't now, because you all think me a story-teller."

She turned away, really grieved and shocked.

"Take her upstairs to her room again," said Miss Ledbury. "Geraldine, your tears are only those of anger and temper."

I did not care now. I suffered myself to be led back to my room, and I left off crying almost as suddenly as I had begun, and when Miss Aspinall shut the door, and left me there without speaking to me again, I sat down on the foot of my bed as if I did not care at all, for again there came over me that strange stolid feeling that nothing mattered, that nothing would ever make me cry again.

It did not last long, however. I got up in a few minutes and looked out of the window. It was the dullest afternoon I had ever seen, raining, raining steadily, the sky all gloomy no-colour, duller even than gray. It might have been any season, late autumn, mid-winter; there was not a leaf, or the tiniest beginning of one, on the black branches of the two or three trees in what was called "the garden" — for my window looked to the back of the house — not the very least feeling of spring, even though we were some way on in April. I gave a little shiver, and then a sudden thought struck me. It would be a very good time for getting out without any one seeing me — no one would fancy it possible that I would venture out in the rain, and all my schoolfellows and the governesses were still at lessons. What was the use of waiting here? They might keep me shut up in my room for — for ever, perhaps — and I should never know about father and mamma, or get Mrs. Selwood's address or be allowed to write to her, or — or any one. I would go.

It took but a few minutes to put on my things. As I have said, there was a queer mixture of childishness and "old-fashionedness," as it is called, about me. I dressed myself as sensibly as if I had been a

I CREPT DOWNSTAIRS, PAST ONE SCHOOLROOM WITH ITS CLOSED DOOR. — C. IX. p. 141.

grown-up person, choosing my thickest boots and warm jacket, and arming myself with my waterproof cape and umbrella. I also put my purse in my pocket — it contained a few shillings.

Then I opened the door and listened, going out a little way into the passage to do so. All was quite quiet — not even a piano was to be heard, only the clock on the landing sounded to me much louder than usual. If I had waited long, it would have made me nervous. I should have begun to fancy it was talking to me like Dick Whittington's bells, though, I am sure, it would not have said anything half so cheering!

But I did not wait to hear. I crept downstairs, past one schoolroom with its closed door, and a muffled sound of voices as I drew quite close to it, then on again, past the downstairs class-room, and along the hall to the front door. For that was what I had made up my mind was the best, bold as it seemed. I would go right out by the front door. I knew it opened easily, for we went out that way on Sundays to church, and once or twice I had opened it. And nobody would ever dream of my passing out that way.

It was all managed quite easily, and almost before

I had time to take in what I had done, I found myself out in the road some little distance from Green Bank, for as soon as the gate closed behind me I had set off running from a half-nervous fear that some one might be coming in pursuit of me. I ran on a little farther, in the same direction, that of the town, for Miss Ledbury's house was in the outskirts — then, out of breath, I stood still to think what I should do.

I had really not made any distinct plan. The only idea clearly in my mind was to get Mrs. Selwood's address, so that I could write to her. But as I stood there, another thought struck me. I would go home — to the house in the dull street which had never seemed dull to me! For there, I suddenly remembered, I might find one of our own servants. I recollected Lydia's telling me that cook was probably going to "engage" with the people who had taken the house. And cook would be sure to know Mrs. Selwood's address, and — *perhaps* — cook would be able to tell me something about father and mamma. She was a kind woman — I would not mind telling her how dreadfully frightened I was about them since Harriet Smith had repeated what she had heard.

I knew the way to our house, at least I thought I did, though afterwards I found I had taken two or three wrong turnings, which had made my journey longer. It was scarcely raining by this time, but the streets were dreadfully wet and muddy, and the sky still dark and gloomy.

At last I found myself at the well-known corner of our street — how often I had run round it with Haddie, when we had been allowed to go on some little errand by ourselves! I had not passed this way since mamma went, and the feeling that came over me was very strange. I went along till I came to our house, number 39; then, in a sort of dream, I mounted the two or three steps to the door, and rang the bell. How well I knew its sound! It seemed impossible to believe that Lydia would not open to me, and that if I hurried upstairs I should not find mamma sitting in her usual place in the drawing-room!

But of course it was not so. A strange face met me as the door drew back, and for a moment or two I felt too confused to speak, though I saw the servant was looking at me in surprise.

"Is — can I see cook?" I got out at last.

"Cook," the maid repeated. "I'm sure I can't

say. Can't you give me your message — Miss?" adding the last word after a little hesitation.

"I'd rather see her, please. I want to ask her for Mrs. Selwood's address. Mrs. Selwood's a friend of mamma's, and I'm sure cook would know. We used to live here, and Lydia said cook was going to stay."

The servant's face cleared, but her reply was not encouraging.

"Oh," she said, "I see. But it's no use your seeing our cook, Miss. She's a stranger. The other one — Sarah Wells was her name ——"

"Yes, yes," I exclaimed, "that's her."

"She's gone — weeks ago. Her father was ill, and she had to go home. I'm sorry, Miss" — she was a good-natured girl — "but it can't be helped. And I think you'd better go home quick. It's coming on to rain again, and it'll soon be dark, and you're such a little young lady to be out alone."

"Thank you," I said, and I turned away, my heart swelling with disappointment.

I walked on quickly for a little way, for I felt sure the servant was looking after me. Then I stopped short and asked myself again "what should I do?" The girl had advised me to go "home" — "home" to Green Bank, to be shut up in my room again, and be

treated as a story-teller, and never have a chance of writing to Mrs. Selwood or any one! No, that I would not do. The very thought of it made me hasten my steps as if to put a greater distance between myself and Miss Ledbury's house. And I walked on some way without knowing where I was going except that it was in an opposite direction from school.

It must have been nearly six o'clock by this time, and the gloomy day made it already dusk. The shops were lighting up, and the glare of the gas on the wet pavement made me look about me. I was in one of the larger streets now, a very long one, that led right out from the centre of the town to the outskirts. I was full of a strange kind of excitement; I did not mind the rain, and indeed it was not very heavy; I did not feel lonely or frightened, and my brain seemed unusually active and awake.

"I know what I'll do," I said to myself; "I'll go to the big grocer's where they give Haddie and me those nice gingerbreads, and I'll ask *them* for Mrs. Selwood's address. I remember mamma said Mrs. Selwood always bought things there. And — and — I won't write to her. I'll go to the railway and see if I've money enough to get a ticket, and I'll go to

Mrs. Selwood and tell her how I can't bear it any longer. I've got four shillings, and if that isn't enough I daresay the railway people wouldn't mind if I promised I'd send it them."

I marched on, feeling once more very determined and valiant. I thought I knew the way to the big grocer's quite well, but when I turned down a street which looked like the one where it was, I began to feel a little confused. There were so many shops, and the lights in the windows dazzled me, and worst of all, I could not remember the name of the grocer's. It was something like Simpson, but not Simpson. I went on, turning again more than once, always in hopes of seeing it before me, but always disappointed. And I was beginning to feel very tired; I must, I suppose, have been really tired all the time, but my excitement had kept me up.

At last I found myself in a much darker street than the others. For there were few shops in it, and most of the houses were offices of some kind. It was a wide street and rather hilly. As I stood at the top I saw it sloping down before me; the light of the tall lamps glimmered brokenly in the puddles, for it was raining again more heavily now. Suddenly, as if in a dream, some words came back to

me, so clearly that I could almost have believed some one was speaking. It was mamma's voice.

"You had better put on your mackintosh, Haddie," I seemed to hear her say, and then I remembered it all — it came before me like a picture — that rainy evening not many months ago when mamma and Haddie and I had walked home so happily, we two tugging at her arms, one on each side, heedless of the rain or the darkness, or anything except that we were all together.

I stood still. Never, I think, was a child's heart more nearly breaking.

CHAPTER X.

TAKING REFUGE.

For a minute or two I seemed to feel nothing; then there came over me a sort of shiver, partly of cold, for it *was* very cold, partly of misery. I roused myself, however. With the remembrance of that other evening had come to me also the knowledge of where I was. Only a few yards down the sloping street on the left-hand side came a wide stretch of pavement, and there, in a kind of angle, stood a double door, open on both sides, leading into a small outer hall, from which again another door, glazed at the top, was the entrance to Cranston's show-rooms.

I remembered it all perfectly. Just beyond the inner entrance stood the two carved lions that Haddie and I admired so much. I wished I could see them again, and — yes — a flash of joy went through me at the thought — I could get Mrs. Selwood's address quite as well from old Mr. Cranston as from the big grocer!

As soon as the idea struck me I hurried on, seeming to gain fresh strength and energy. It was almost dark, but a gas-lamp was burning dimly above the lintel, and inside, on the glass of the inner door, were the large gilt letters "Cranston and Co."

I ran up the two or three broad shallow steps and pushed open the door, which was a swing one. It was nearly time for closing, but that I did not know. There was no one to be seen inside, not, at least, in the first room, and the door made no noise. But there stood the dear lions — I could not see them very clearly, for the place was not brightly lighted, but I crept up to them, and stroked softly the one nearest me. They seemed like real friends.

I had not courage to go into the other show-room, and all was so perfectly still that I could scarcely think any one was there. I thought I would wait a few minutes in hopes of some one coming out, of whom I could inquire if I could see Mr. Cranston. And I was now beginning to feel so tired — so very tired, and so cold.

In here, though I did not see any fire, it felt ever so much warmer than outside. There was no chair or stool, but I found a seat for myself on the stand of the farther-in lion — each of them had a heavy

wooden stand. It seemed very comfortable, and I soon found that by moving on a little I could get a nice rest for my head against the lion's body. A strange pleasant sense of protection and comfort came over me.

"How glad I am I came in here," I said to myself. "I don't mind if I have to wait a good while. It is so cosy and warm."

I no longer made any plans. I knew I wanted to ask for Mrs. Selwood's address, but that was all I thought of. What I should do when I had got it I did not know; where I should go for the night, for it was now quite dark, I did not trouble about in the least. I think I must have been very much in the condition I have heard described, of travellers lost in the snow — the overpowering wish to stay where I was and rest, was all I was conscious of. I did not think of going to sleep. I did not know I was sleepy.

And for some time I knew nothing.

The first thing that caught my attention was a very low murmur — so low that it might have been merely a breath of air playing in the keyhole; I seemed to have been hearing it for some time before it took shape, as it were, and grew into a

softly-whispering voice, gradually gathering into words.

"Poor little girl; so she has come at last. Well, as you say, brother, we have been expecting her for a good while, have we not?"

"Yes, indeed, but speak softly. It would be a pity to awake her. And what we have to do can be done just as well while she sleeps."

"I don't agree with you," said the first speaker. "I should much prefer her being awake. She would enjoy the ride, and she is an intelligent child and would profit by our conversation."

"As you like," replied number two. "I must be off to fetch the boy. She will perhaps be awake by the time I return."

And then — just as I was on the point of starting up and telling them I *was* awake — came a sound of stamping and rustling, and a sort of whirr and a breath of cold air, which told me the swing door had been opened. And when I sat straight up and looked about me, lo and behold, there was only one lion to be seen — the stand of his brother was empty!

"I — please I *am* awake," I said rather timidly. "It was me you were talking about, wasn't it?"

"*I* — 'it was *I*' — the verb to be takes the same

case after it as before it," was the reply, much to my surprise and rather to my disgust. Who would have thought that the carved lions bothered about grammar!

"It was I, then," I repeated meekly. I did not want to give any offence to my new friend. "Please — I heard you saying something — something about going a ride. And where has the — the other Mr. Lion gone? I heard about — a boy."

"You heard correctly," my lion replied, and I knew somehow that he was smiling, or whatever lions do that matches smiling. "My brother has gone to fetch *your* brother — we planned it all some time ago — we shall meet on the sea-shore and travel together. But we should be starting. Can you climb up on to my back?"

"Oh yes," I said quite calmly, as if there was nothing the least out of the common in all this, "I'm sure I can."

"Catch hold of my mane," said the lion; "don't mind tugging, it won't hurt," and — not to my surprise, for nothing surprised me — I felt my hands full of soft silky hair, as the lion shook down his long wavy mane to help my ascent.

Nothing was easier. In another moment I was

cosily settled on his back, which felt deliciously comfortable, and the mane seemed to tuck itself round me like a fleecy rug.

"Shut your eyes," said my conductor or steed, I don't know which to call him; "go to sleep if you like. I'll wake you when we meet the others."

"Thank you," I said, feeling too content and comfortable to disagree with anything he said.

Then came a feeling of being raised up, a breath of colder air, which seemed to grow warm again almost immediately, and I knew nothing more till I heard the words, "Here they are."

I opened my eyes and looked about me. It was night — overhead in the deep blue sky innumerable stars were sparkling, and down below at our feet I heard the lap-lap of rippling waves. A dark, half-shadowy figure stood at my right hand, and as I saw it more clearly I distinguished the form of the other lion, with — yes, there was some one sitting on his back.

"Haddie," I exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, Geraldine, it's me," my brother's own dear voice replied. "We're going right over the sea — did you know? — isn't it splendid? We're going

to see father and mamma. Hold out your hand so that you can feel mine."

I did so, and my fingers clasped his, and at that moment the brother lions rose into the air, and down below, even fainter and fainter, came the murmur of the sea, while up above, the twinkling stars looked down on what surely was one of the strangest sights they had ever seen in all their long, long experience!

Then again I seemed to know nothing, though somehow, all through, I felt the clasp of Haddie's hand and knew we were close together.

A beautiful light streaming down upon us, of which I was conscious even through my closed eyelids, was the next thing I remember. It seemed warm as well as bright, and I felt as if basking in it.

"Wake up, Geraldine," said Haddie's voice.

I opened my eyes. But now I have come to a part of my story which I have never been able, and never shall be able, to put into fitting words. The scene before me was too beautiful, too magically exquisite for me even to succeed in giving the faintest idea of it. Still I must try, though knowing that I cannot but fail.

Can you picture to yourselves the loveliest day of all the perfect summer days you have ever known —

THE BROTHER LIONS ROSE INTO THE AIR. — C. X. p. 164.

no, more than that, a day like summer and spring in one — the richness of colour, the balmy fragrance of the prime of the year joined to the freshness, the indescribable hopefulness and expectation which is the charm of the spring? The beauty and delight seemed made up of everything lovely mingled together — sights, sounds, scents, feelings. There was the murmur of running streams, the singing of birds, the most delicious scent from the flowers growing in profusion and of every shade of colour.

Haddie and I looked at each other — we still held each other by the hand, but now, somehow, we were standing together on the grass, though I could not remember having got down from my perch on the lion's back.

"Where are the lions, Haddie?" I said.

Haddie seemed to understand everything better than I did.

"They're all right," he replied, "resting a little. You see we've come a long way, Geraldine, and so quick."

"And where are we?" I asked. "What is this place, Haddie? Is it fairyland or — or — heaven?"

Haddie smiled.

"It's not either," he said. "You'll find out the

name yourself. But come, we must be quick, for we can't stay very long. Hold my hand tight and then we can run faster."

I seemed to know that something more beautiful than anything we had seen yet was coming. I did not ask Haddie any more questions, even though I had a feeling that he knew more than I did. He seemed quite at home in this wonderful place, quite able to guide me. And his face was shining with happiness.

We ran a good way, and very fast. But I did not feel at all tired or breathless. My feet seemed to have wings, and all the time the garden around us grew lovelier and lovelier. If Haddie had not been holding my hand so fast I should scarcely have been able to resist stopping to gather some of the lovely flowers everywhere in such profusion, or to stand still to listen to the dear little birds singing so exquisitely overhead.

"It must be fairyland," I repeated to myself more than once, in spite of what Haddie had said.

But suddenly all thought of fairyland or flowers, birds and garden, went out of my head, as Haddie stopped in his running.

"Geraldine," he half whispered, "look there."

"There" was a little arbour a few yards from where we stood, and there, seated on a rustic bench, her dear face all sunshine, was mamma!

She started up as soon as she saw us and hastened forward, her arms outstretched.

"My darlings, my darlings," she said, as Haddie and I threw ourselves upon her.

She did look so pretty; she was all in white, and she had a rose — one of the lovely roses I had been admiring as we ran — fastened to the front of her dress.

"Mamma, mamma," I exclaimed, as I hugged her, "oh, mamma, I am so happy to be with you. Is this your garden, mamma, and may we stay with you always now? Wasn't it good of the lions to bring us? I have been so unhappy, mamma — somebody said you would get ill far away. But nobody could get ill here. Oh, mamma, you will let us stay always."

She did not speak, but looking at Haddie I saw a change in his face.

"Geraldine," he said, "I told you we couldn't stay long. The lions would be scolded if we did, and you know you must say your French poetry."

And then there came over me the most agonising

feeling of disappointment and misery. All the pent-up wretchedness of the last weeks at school woke up and overwhelmed me like waves of dark water. It is as impossible for me to put this into words as it was for me to describe my exquisite happiness, for no words ever succeed in expressing the intense and extraordinary sensations of some dreams. And of course, as you will have found out by this time, the strange adventures I have been relating were those of a dream, though I still, after all the years that have passed since then, remember them so vividly.

It was the fatal words "French poetry" that seemed to awake me — to bring back my terrible unhappiness, exaggerated by the fact of my dreaming.

"French poetry," I gasped, "oh, Haddie, how can you remind me of it?"

Haddie suddenly turned away, and I saw the face of one of the lions looking over his shoulder, with, strange to say, a white frilled cap surrounding it.

"You must try to drink this, my dear," said the lion, if the lion it was, for as I stared at him the brown face changed into a rather ruddy one — a round good-humoured face, with pleasant eyes and smile, reminding me of mamma's old nurse who had once come to see us.

I stared still more, and sat up a little, for, wonderful to relate, I was no longer in the lovely garden, no longer even in the show-room leaning against the lion: I was in bed in a strange room which I had never seen before. And leaning over me was the owner of the frilled cap, holding a glass in her hand.

"Try to drink this, my dearie," she said again, and then I knew it was not the lion but this stranger who had already spoken to me.

I felt very tired, and I sank back again upon the pillow. What did it all mean? Where was I? Where had I been? I asked myself this in a vague sleepy sort of way, but I was too tired to say it aloud, and before I could make up my mind to try I fell asleep again.

The room seemed lighter the next time I opened my eyes. It was in fact nearly the middle of the day, and a fine day — as clear as it ever was in Great Mexington. I felt much better and less tired now, almost quite well, except for a slight pain in my throat which told me I must have caught cold, as my colds generally began in my throat.

"I wonder if it was with riding so far in the night," I first said to myself, with a confused remembrance of my wonderful dream. "I didn't feel at

all cold on the lion's back, and in the garden it was lovelily warm."

Then, as my waking senses quite returned, I started. It had been only a dream — oh dear, oh dear! But still, *something* had happened — I was certainly not in my little bed in the corner of the room I shared with Emma and Harriet Smith at Green Bank. When had my dream begun, or was I still dreaming?

I raised myself a little, very softly, for now I began to remember the good-humoured face in the frilled cap, and I thought to myself that unless its owner were a dream too, perhaps she was still in the room, and I wanted to look about me first on my own account.

What there was to see was very pleasant and very real. I felt quite sure I was not dreaming now, wherever I was. It was a large old-fashioned room, with red curtains at the two windows and handsome dark wood furniture. There was a fire burning cheerfully in the grate and the windows looked very clean, even though there was a prospect of chimney-tops to be seen out of the one nearest to me, which told me I was still in a town. And then I began to distinguish sounds outside, though here in this room

it was so still. There were lots of wheels passing, some going quickly, some lumbering along with heavy slowness — it was much noisier than at Miss Ledbury's or at my own old home. Here I seemed to be in the very heart of a town. I began to recall the events of the day before more clearly. Yes, up to the time I remembered leaning against the carved lion in Mr. Cranston's show-room all had been real, I felt certain. I recollected with a little shiver the scene in the drawing-room at Green Bank, and how they had all refused to believe I was speaking the truth when I declared that the French poetry had entirely gone out of my head. And then there was the making up my mind that I could bear school no longer, and the secretly leaving the house, and at last losing my way in the streets.

I had meant to go to Mrs. Selwood's, or at least to get her address and write to her — but where was I now? — what should I do?

My head grew dizzy again with trying to think, and a faint miserable feeling came over me and I burst into tears.

I did not cry loudly. But there was some one watching in the room who would have heard even a fainter sound than that of my sobs — some one sit-

ing behind my bed-curtains whom I had not seen, who came forward now and leant over me, saying, in words and voice which seemed curiously familiar to me,

"Geraldine, my poor little girl."

CHAPTER XI.

KIND FRIENDS.

It was Miss Fenmore. I knew her again at once. And she called me "my poor little girl" — the very words she had used when she said good-bye to me and looked so sorry before she went away for the Easter holidays, never to come back, though she did not then know it, to Green Bank.

"You remember me, dear?" she said, in the sweet tones I had loved to hear. "Don't speak if you feel too ill or if it tires you. But don't feel frightened or unhappy, though you are in a strange place — everything will be right."

I felt soothed almost at once, but my curiosity grew greater.

"When did you come?" I said. "You weren't here when I woke before. It was — somebody with a cap — first I thought it was one of the lions."

The sound of my own voice surprised me, it was

so feeble and husky, and though my throat did not hurt me much I felt that it was thick and swollen.

Miss Fenmore thought I was still only half awake or light-headed, but she was too sensible to show that she thought so.

"One of the lions?" she said, smiling. "You mean the carved lions that Myra is so fond of. No — that was a very funny fancy of yours — a lion with a cap on! It was old Hannah that you saw, the old nurse. She has been watching beside you all night. When you awoke before, I was out. I went out very early."

She spoke in a very matter-of-fact way, but rather slowly, as if she wanted to be sure of my understanding what she said. And as my mind cleared and I followed her words I grew more and more anxious to know all there was to hear.

"I don't understand," I said, "and it hurts me to speak. Is this your house, Miss Fenmore, and how do you know about the lions? And who brought me in here, and why didn't I know when I was put in this bed?"

Miss Fenmore looked at me rather anxiously when I said it hurt me to speak. But she seemed pleased, too, at my asking the questions so distinctly.

"Don't speak, dear," she said quietly, "and I will explain it all. The doctor said you were not to speak if it hurt you."

"The doctor," I repeated. Another puzzle!

"Yes," said Miss Fenmore, "the doctor who lives in this street — Dr. Fallis. He knows you quite well, and you know him, don't you? Just nod your head a little, instead of speaking."

But the doctor's name brought back too many thoughts for me to be content with only nodding my head.

"Dr. Fallis," I said. "Oh, I would so like to see him. He could tell me ——" but I stopped. "Mrs. Selwood's address" I was going to say, as all the memories of the day before began to rush over me. "Why didn't I know when he came?"

"You were asleep, dear, but he is coming again," said Miss Fenmore quietly. "He was afraid you had got a sore throat by the way you breathed. You must have caught cold in the evening down in the show-room by the lions, before they found you."

And then she went on to explain it all to me. I was in Mr. Cranston's house! — up above the big show-rooms, where he and old Mrs. Cranston lived. They had found me fast asleep, leaning against one

of the lions — the old porter and the boy who went round late in the evening to see that all was right for the night, though when the rooms were shut up earlier no one had noticed me. I was so fast asleep, so utterly exhausted, that I had not awakened when the old man carried me up to the kitchen, just as the servants were about going to bed, to ask what in the world was to be done with me; nor even later, when, on Miss Fenmore's recognising me, they had undressed and settled me for the night in the comfortable old-fashioned "best bedroom," had I opened my eyes or spoken.

Old Hannah watched beside me all night, and quite early in the morning Dr. Fallis, who fortunately was the Cranstons' doctor too, had been sent for.

"He said we were to let you have your sleep out," said Miss Fenmore, "though by your breathing he was afraid you had caught cold. How is your throat now, dear?"

"It doesn't hurt very much," I said, "only it feels very shut up."

"I expect you will have to stay in bed all to-day," she replied. "Dr. Fallis will be coming soon and then we shall know."

"But — but," I began; then as the thought of it all came over me still more distinctly I hid my face in the pillow and burst into tears. "Must I go back to school?" I said. "Oh, Miss Fenmore, they will be so angry — I came away without leave, because — because I couldn't bear it, and they said I told what wasn't true — that was almost the worst of all. Fancy if they wrote and told mamma that I told lies."

"She would not believe it," said Miss Fenmore quietly; "and besides, I don't think Miss Ledbury would do such a thing, and she always writes to the parents herself, I know. And she *is* kind and good, Geraldine."

"P'raps she means to be," I said among my tears, "but it's Miss Aspinall and — and — Miss Broom. I think I hate her, Miss Fenmore. Oh, I shouldn't say that — I never used to hate anybody. I'm getting all wrong and naughty, I know," and I burst into fresh sobs.

Poor Miss Fenmore looked much distressed. No doubt she had been told to keep me quiet and not let me excite myself.

"Geraldine, dear," she said, "do try to be calm. If you could tell me all about it quietly, the speaking

would do you less harm than crying so. Try, dear. You need not speak loud."

I swallowed down my tears and began the story of my troubles. Once started I could not have helped telling her all, even if it had hurt my throat much more than it did. And she knew a good deal already. She was a girl of great natural quickness and full of sympathy. She seemed to understand what I had been going through far better than I could put it in words, and when at last, tired out, I left off speaking, she said all she could to comfort me. There was no need for me to trouble about going back to Green Bank just now. Dr. Fallis had said I must stay where I was for the present, and when I saw him I might tell him anything I liked.

"He will understand," she said, "and he will explain to Miss Ledbury. I have seen Miss Ledbury this morning already, and ——"

"Was she dreadfully angry?" I interrupted.

"No, dear," Miss Fenmore replied. "She had been terribly frightened about you, and Miss Aspinall and some of the servants had been rushing about everywhere. But Miss Ledbury is very good, as I keep telling you, Geraldine. She is very sorry to hear how unhappy you have been, and if she had

known how anxious you were about your father and mother she would have tried to comfort you. I wish you had told her."

"I wanted to tell her, but Miss Broom was there, and they thought I told stories," I repeated.

"Well, never mind about that now. You shall ask Dr. Fallis, and I am sure he will tell you you need not be so unhappy."

It was not till long afterwards that I knew how very distressed poor old Miss Ledbury had been, and how she had blamed herself for not having tried harder to gain my confidence. Nor did I fully understand at the time how very sensibly Miss Fenmore had behaved when Mr. and Mrs. Cranston sent her off to Green Bank to tell of my having, without intending it, taken refuge with them; she had explained things so that Miss Ledbury, and indeed Miss Aspinall, felt far more sorry for me than angry with me.

Just as Miss Fenmore mentioned his name there came a tap at the door, and in another moment I saw the kind well-known face of our old doctor looking in.

"Well, well," he began, looking at me with a rather odd smile, "and how is the little runaway? My dear child, why did you not come to me, instead of wan-

dering all about Great Mexington streets in the dark and the rain? Not that you could have found anywhere better for yourself than this kind house, but you might have been all night downstairs in the cold! Tell me, what made you run away like that — no, don't tell me just yet. It is all right now, but I think you have talked enough. Has she had anything to eat?" and he turned to Miss Fenmore. Then he looked at my throat and listened to my breathing, and tapped me and felt my pulse and looked at my tongue before I could speak at all.

"She must stay in bed all to-day," he said at last. "I will see her again this evening," and he went on to give Miss Fenmore a few directions about me, I fidgeting all the time to ask him about father and mamma, though feeling too shy to do so.

"Geraldine is very anxious to tell you one of the chief causes of her coming away from Green Bank as she did," said Miss Fenmore. And then she spoke of the gossip that had reached me through Harriet Smith about the terribly unhealthy climate my parents were in.

Dr. Fallis listened attentively.

"I wanted to write to Mrs. Selwood, and I thought

Mr. Cranston would tell me her address," I said, though I almost started when I heard how hoarse and husky my voice sounded. "Can you tell it me? I do so want to write to her."

"Mrs. Selwood is abroad, my dear, and not returning till next month," said Dr. Fallis; but when he saw how my face fell, he added quickly, "but I think I can tell you perhaps better than she about your parents. I know the place — Mr. Le Marchant consulted me about it before he decided on going, as he knew I had been there myself in my young days. Unhealthy? No, not if people take proper care. Your father and mother live in the best part — on high ground out of the town — there is never any fever there. And I had a most cheerful letter from your father quite lately. Put all these fears out of your head, my poor child. Please God you will have papa and mamma safe home again before long. But they must not find such a poor little white shrimp of a daughter when they come. You must get strong and well and do all that this kind young lady tells you to do. Good-bye — good-bye," and he hurried off.

I was crying again by this time, but quietly now, and my tears were not altogether because I was weak and ill. They were in great measure tears of relief —

I was so thankful to hear what he said about father and mamma.

"Miss Fenmore," I whispered, "I wonder why they didn't take me with them, if it's a nice place. And then there wouldn't have been all these dreadful things."

"It is quite a different matter to take a child to a hot climate," she said. "Grown-up people can stand much that would be very bad for girls and boys. When I was little my father was in India, and my sister and I had to be brought up by an aunt in England."

"Did you mind?" I said eagerly. "And did your papa soon come home? And where was your mamma?"

Miss Fenmore smiled, but there was something a little sad in her smile.

"I was very happy with my aunt," she said; "she was like a mother to me. For my mother died when I was a little baby. Yes, my father has been home several times, but he is in India again now, and he won't be able to come back for good till he is quite old. So you have much happier things to look forward to, you see, Geraldine."

That was true. I felt very sorry for Miss Fen-

more as I lay thinking over what she had been telling me. Then another idea struck me.

"Is Mrs. Cranston your aunt?" I said. "Is that why you are living here?"

Miss Fenmore looked up quickly.

"No," she replied; "I thought somehow that you understood. I am here because I am Myra Raby's governess — Myra Raby, who used to come for some lessons to Green Bank."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. This explained several things. "Oh yes," I went on, "I remember her, and I know she's Mr. Cranston's grand-daughter — he was speaking of her to mamma one day. I should like to see her, Miss Fenmore. May I?"

Miss Fenmore was just going to reply when again there came a tap at the door, and in answer to her "Come in" it opened and two figures appeared.

I could see them from where I lay, and I shall never forget the pretty picture they made. Myra I knew by sight, and as I think I have said before, she was an unusually lovely child. And with her was a quite old lady, a small old lady — Myra was nearly as tall as she — with a face that even I (though children seldom notice beauty in elderly people) saw was quite charming. This was Mrs. Cranston.

I felt quite surprised. Mr. Cranston was a rather stout old man, with spectacles and a big nose. I had not thought him at all "pretty," and somehow I had fancied Mrs. Cranston must be something like him, and I gave a sigh of pleasure as the old lady came up to the side of the bed with a gentle smile on her face.

"Dr. Fallis gave us leave to come in to see you, my dear," she said. "Myra has been longing to do so all the morning."

"I've been wanting to see her too," I said, half shyly. "And — please — it's very kind of you to let me stay here in this nice room. I didn't mean to fall asleep downstairs. I only wanted to speak to Mr. Cranston."

"I'm sure Mr. Cranston would be very pleased to tell you anything he can that you want to know, my dear. But I think you mustn't trouble just now about anything except getting quite well," said the old lady. "Myra has been wanting to come to see you all the morning, but we were afraid of tiring you."

Myra came forward gently, her sweet face looking rather grave. I put out my hand, and she smiled.

"May she stay with me a little?" I asked Mrs. Cranston.

MYRA CAME FORWARD GENTLY, HER SWEET FACE LOOKING RATHER GRAVE. — C. xi. p. 174.

"Of course she may — that's what she came for," said the grandmother heartily. "But I don't think you should talk much. Missie's voice sounds as if it hurt her to speak," she went on, turning to Miss Fenmore.

"It doesn't hurt me much," I said. "I daresay I shall be quite well to-morrow. I am so glad I'm here — I wouldn't have liked to be ill at school," and I gave a little shudder. "I'm quite happy now that Dr. Fallis says it's not true about father and mamma getting ill at that place, and I don't want to ask Mr. Cranston anything now, thank you. It was about Mrs. Selwood, but I don't mind now."

I had been sitting up a little — now I laid my head down on the pillows again with a little sigh, half of weariness, half of relief.

Mrs. Cranston looked at me rather anxiously.

"Are you very tired, my dear?" she said. "Perhaps it would be better for Myra not to stay just now."

"Oh, please let her stay," I said; "I like to see her."

So Myra sat down beside my bed and took hold of my hand, and though we did not speak to each other, I liked the feeling of her being there.

Mrs. Cranston left the room then, and Miss Fen-

more followed her. I think the old lady had made her a little sign to do so, though I did not see it. Afterwards I found out that Mrs. Cranston had thought me looking very ill, worse than she had expected, and she wanted to hear from Miss Fenmore if it was natural to me to look so pale.

I myself, though feeling tired and disinclined to talk, was really happier than I had been for a very long time. There was a delightful sensation of being safe and at home, even though the kind people who had taken me in, like a poor little stray bird, were strangers. The very look of the old-fashioned room and the comfortable great big four-post bed made me hug myself when I thought how different it all was from the bare cold room at Green Bank, where there had never once been a fire all the weeks I was there. It reminded me of something — what was it? Oh yes, in a minute or two I remembered. It was the room I had once slept in with mamma at grandmamma's house in London, several years before, when I was quite a little girl. For dear grandmamma had died soon after we came to live at Great Mexington. But there was the same comfortable old-fashioned feeling: red curtains to the window and the bed, and a big fire and the shiny dark mahogany furniture.

Oh yes, how well I remembered it, and how enormous the bed seemed, and how mamma tucked me in at night and left the door a little open in case I should feel lonely before she came to bed. It all came back to me so that I forgot where I was for the moment, till I felt a little tug given to the hand that Myra was still holding, and heard her voice say very softly,

"Are you going to sleep, Geraldine?"

This brought me back to the present.

"Oh no," I said, "I'm not sleepy. I was only thinking," and I told her what had come into my mind.

She listened with great interest.

"How unhappy you must have been when your mamma went away," she said. "I can't remember my own mamma, but mother"—she meant her step-mother—"is so kind, and granny is so sweet. I've never been lonely."

"You can't fancy what it's like," I said. "It wasn't only mamma's going away; I know Haddie—that's my brother—loves her as much as I do, but he's not very unhappy, because he likes his school. Oh, Myra, what *shall* I do when I have to go back to school? I'd rather be ill always. Do you think I'll have to go back to-morrow?"

Myra looked most sympathising and concerned.

"I don't think you'll be quite well to-morrow," was the best comfort she could give me. "When I have bad colds and sore throats they always last longer than one day."

"I'd like to talk a great lot to keep my throat from getting quite well," I said, "but I suppose that would be very naughty."

"Yes," said Myra with conviction, "I'm sure it would be. You really mustn't talk, Geraldine; granny said so. May.n't I read aloud to you? I've brought a book with me — it's an old story-book of mamma's that she had when she was a little girl. Granny keeps them here all together. This one is called *Ornaments Discovered*."

"Thank you," I said. "Yes, I should like it very much."

And in her gentle little voice Myra read the quaint old story aloud to me. It was old-fashioned even then, for the book had belonged to her mother, if not in the first place to her grandmother. How very old-world it would seem to the children of to-day — I wonder if any of you know it? For I am growing quite an old woman myself, and the little history of my childhood that I am telling you

will, before long, be half a century in age, though its events seem as clear and distinct to me as if they had only happened quite recently! I came across the little red gilt-leaved book not long ago in the house of one of Myra's daughters, and with the sight of it a whole flood of memories rushed over me.

It was not a very exciting story, but I found it very interesting, and now and then my little friend stopped to talk about it, which I found very interesting too. I was quite sorry when Miss Fenmore, who had come back to the room and was sitting quietly sewing, told Myra that she thought she had read enough, and that it must be near dinner-time.

"I will come again after dinner," said Myra, and then I whispered something to her. She nodded; she quite understood me. What I said was this:

"I wish you would go downstairs and tell the carved lions that they made me very happy last night, and I *am* so glad they brought me back here to you, instead of taking me to Green Bank."

"Where did they take you to in the night?" said Myra with great interest, though not at all as if she thought I was talking nonsense.

"I'll tell you all about it afterwards," I said. "It

was beautiful. But it would take a long time to tell, and I'm rather tired."

"You are looking tired, dear," said Miss Fenmore, who heard my last words, as she gave me a cupful of beef-tea. "Try to go to sleep for a little, and then Myra can come to sit with you again."

I did go to sleep, but Myra was not allowed to see me again that day, nor the next — nor for several days after, except for a very few minutes at a time. For I did not improve as the kind people about me had hoped I would, and Dr. Fallis looked graver when he came that evening than he had done in the morning. Miss Fenmore was afraid she had let me talk too much, but after all I do not think anything would have made any great difference. I had really been falling out of health for months past, and I should probably have got ill in some other way if I had not caught cold in my wanderings. I do not very clearly remember those days of serious illness. I knew whenever I was awake that I was being tenderly cared for, and in the half-dozing, half-dreaming state in which many hours must have been passed, I fancied more than once that mamma was beside me, which made me very happy. And though never actually delirious, I had very strange

though not unpleasant dreams, especially about the carved lions; none of them, however, so clear and real as the one I related at full in the last chapter.

On the whole, that illness left more peaceful and sweet memories than memories of pain. Through it all I had the delightful feeling of being cared for and protected, and somehow it all seemed to have to do with the pair of lions downstairs in Mr. Cranston's show-room!

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD NEWS.

I DON'T suppose there was anything really infectious about my illness, though nowadays whenever there is any sort of sore throat people are very much on their guard. Perhaps they were not so cautious long ago. However that may have been, Myra was not banished from my room for very long. I rather think, indeed, that she used to creep in and sit like a little mouse behind the curtains before I was well enough to notice her.

But everything for a time seemed dreamy to me. The first event I can quite clearly recall was my being allowed to sit up for an hour or two, or, more correctly speaking, to *lie* up, for I was lifted on to the sofa and tucked in almost as if I were still in bed.

That was a very happy afternoon. It was happy for several reasons, for that morning had brought me the first letter I had had from dear mamma since

she had heard of my bold step in running away from school! Lying still and silent for so many hours as I had done, things had grown to look differently to me. I began to see where and how I had been wrong, and to think that if I had been more open about my troubles, more courageous — that is to say, if I had gone to Miss Ledbury and told her everything that was on my mind — I need not have been so terribly unhappy or caused trouble and distress to others.

A little of this mamma pointed out to me in her letter, which was, however, so very kind and loving, so full of sorrow that I had been so unhappy, that I felt more grateful than I knew how to express. Afterwards, when we talked it all over, years afterwards even, for we often talked of that time after I was grown up and married, and had children of my own, mamma said to me that she *could* not blame me though she knew I had not done right, for she felt so broken-hearted at the thought of what I had suffered.

It had been a mistake, no doubt, to send me to Green Bank, but mistakes are often overruled for good. I am glad to have had the experience of it, as I think it made me more sympathising with

others. And it made me determine never to send any child of mine, or any child I had the care of, to a school where there was so little feeling of *home*, so little affection and gentleness — above all, that dreadful old-world rule of letters being read, and the want of trust and confidence in the pupils, which showed in so many ways.

A few days after I received mamma's letter I was allowed to write to her. It was slow and tiring work, for I was only able to write a few lines at a time, and that in pencil. But it was delightful to be free to say just what I wanted to say, without the terrible feeling of Miss Aspinall, or worse still Miss Broom, judging and criticising every line. I thanked mamma with my whole heart for not being angry with me, and to show her how truly I meant what I said, I promised her that when I was well again and able to go back to school I would try my very, very best to get on more happily.

But I gave a deep sigh as I wrote this, and Myra, who was sitting beside me, looked up anxiously, and asked what was the matter.

"Oh, Myra," I said, "it is just that I can't bear to think of going back to school. I'd rather never get well if only I could stay here till mamma comes home."

"Dear little Geraldine," said Myra — she often called me "little" though she was *scarcely* any taller than I — "dear little Geraldine, you mustn't say that. I don't think it's right. And, you know, when you are quite well again things won't seem so bad to you. I remember once when I was ill — I was quite a little girl then," — Myra spoke as if she was now a very big girl indeed! — "I think it was when I had had the measles, the least thing vexed me dreadfully. I cried because somebody had given me a present of a set of wooden tea-things in a box, and the tea ran out of the cups when I filled them! Fancy crying for that!"

"I know," I said, "I've felt like that too. But this is a *real* trouble, Myra — a real, very bad, dreadful trouble, though I've promised mamma to try to be good. Do you think, Myra, that when I'm back at school your grandmamma will sometimes ask me to come to see you?"

"I'm sure ——" my little friend began eagerly. But she was interrupted. For curiously enough, just at that moment Mrs. Cranston opened the door and came in. She came to see me every day, and though at first I was just a tiny bit afraid of her — she seemed to me such a very old lady — I soon got to

love her dearly, and to talk to her quite as readily as to kind Miss Fenmore.

"What is my little girl sure about?" she said. "And how is my other little girl to-day? Not too tired," and she glanced at my letter. "You have not been writing too much, dearie, I hope?"

"No, thank you," I replied, "I'm not tired."

"She's only rather unhappy, granny," said Myra.

"I think that's a very big 'only,'" said Mrs. Cranston. "Can't you tell me, my dear, what you are unhappy about?"

I glanced at Myra, as if asking her to speak for me. She understood.

"Granny," she said, "poor little Geraldine is unhappy to think of going away and going back to school."

Mrs. Cranston looked at me very kindly.

"Poor dear," she said, "you have not had much pleasure with us, as you have been ill all the time."

"I don't mind," I said. "I was telling Myra, only she thought it was naughty, that I'd rather be ill always if I was with kind people, than — than — be at school where nobody cares for me."

"Well, well, my dear, the troubles we dread are often those that don't come to pass. Try to keep

up your spirits and get quite well and strong, so that you may be able to enjoy yourself a little before both you and Myra leave us."

"Oh, is Myra going away?" I said. "I thought she was going to live here always," and somehow I felt as if I did not mind *quite* so much to think of going away myself in that case.

"Oh no," said the old lady, "Myra has her own home where she must spend part of her time, though grandfather and I hope to have her here a good deal too. It is easy to manage now Miss Fenmore is with her always."

In my heart I thought Myra a most fortunate child — *two* homes were really hers; and I — I had none. This thought made me sigh again. I don't know if Myra guessed what I was thinking of, but she came close up to me and put her arms round my neck and kissed me.

"Geraldine," she whispered, by way of giving me something pleasant to think of, perhaps, "as soon as you are able to walk about a little I want you to come downstairs with me to see the lions."

"Yes," I said in the same tone, "but you did give them my message, Myra?"

"Of course I did, and they sent you back their

love, and they are very glad you're better, and they want you very much indeed to come to see them."

Myra and I understood each other quite well about the lions, you see.

I went on getting well steadily after that, and not many days later I went downstairs with Myra to the big show-room to see the lions. It gave me such a curious feeling to remember the last time I had been there, that rainy evening when I crept in, as nearly broken-hearted and in despair as a little girl could be. And as I stroked the lions and looked up in their dark mysterious faces, I could not get rid of the idea that they knew all about it, that somehow or other they had helped and protected me, and when I tried to express this to Myra she seemed to think the same.

After this there were not many days on which we did not come downstairs to visit our strange play-fellows, and not a few interesting games or "actings," as Myra called them, did we invent, in which the lions took their part.

We were only allowed to be in the show-rooms at certain hours of the day, when there were not likely to be any customers there. Dear old Mrs. Cranston was as particular as she possibly could be not to

let me do anything or be seen in any way which mamma could possibly have disliked.

And before long I began to join a little in Myra's lessons with Miss Fenmore — lessons which our teacher's kind and "understanding" ways made delightful. So that life was really very happy for me at this time, except of course for the longing for mamma and father and Haddie, which still came over me in fits, as it were, every now and then, and except — a still bigger "except" — for the dreaded thought of the return to school which must be coming nearer day by day.

Myra and I never spoke of it. I tried to forget about it, and she seemed to enter into my feeling without saying anything.

I had had a letter from mamma in answer to the one I wrote to her just after my illness. In it she said she was pleased with all I said, and my promise to try to get on better at Green Bank, but "in the meantime," she wrote, "what we want you to do is to get *quite* strong and well, so put all troubling thoughts out of your head and be happy with your kind friends."

That letter had come a month ago, and the last mail had only brought me a tiny little note enclosed

in a letter from mamma to Mrs. Cranston, with the promise of a longer one "next time." And "next time" was about due, for the mail came every fortnight, one afternoon when Myra and I were sitting together in our favourite nook in the show-room.

"I have a fancy, Myra," I said, "that something is going to happen. My lion has been so queer today — I see a look on his face as if he knew something."

For we had each chosen one lion as more particularly our own.

"I think they always look rather like that," said Myra dreamily. "But I suppose something must happen soon. I shall be going home next week."

"Next week," I repeated. "Oh, Myra!"

I could not speak for a moment. Then I remembered how I had made up my mind to be brave.

"Do you mind going home?" I asked. "I mean, are you sorry to go?"

"I'm always sorry to leave grandpapa and grandmamma," she said, "and the lions, and this funny old house. But I'm very happy at home, and I shall like it still better with Miss Fenmore. No, I wouldn't be unhappy — I'd be very glad to think of seeing father and mother and my little brothers again — I wouldn't

be unhappy, except for — you know, Geraldine — for leaving you," and my little friend's voice shook.

"Dear Myra," I said. "But you mustn't mind about me. I'm going to try ——" but here I had to stop to choke down something in my throat. "After all," I went on, after a moment or two, "more than a quarter of the time that father and mamma have to be away is gone. And perhaps in the summer holidays I shall see Haddie."

"I wish ——" Myra was beginning, but a voice interrupted her. It was Miss Fenmore's.

"I have brought you down a letter that has just come by the second post, Geraldine, dear," she said; "a letter from South America."

"Oh, thank you," I said, eagerly seizing it.

Miss Fenmore strolled to the other side of the room, and Myra followed her, to leave me alone to read my letter. It was a pretty long one, but I read it quickly, so quickly that when I had finished it, I felt breathless — and then I turned over the pages and glanced at it again. I felt as if I could not believe what I read. It was too good, too beautifully good to be true.

"Myra," I gasped, and Myra ran back to me, look-

ing quite startled. I think I must have grown very pale.

"No, no," I went on, "it's nothing wrong. Read it, or ask Miss Fenmore — she reads writing quicker. Oh, Myra, isn't it beautiful?"

They soon read it, and then we all three kissed and hugged each other, and Myra began dancing about as if she had gone out of her mind.

"Geraldine, Geraldine, I can't believe it," she kept saying, and Miss Fenmore's pretty eyes were full of tears.

I wonder if any of my readers can guess what this delightful news was? It was not that mamma was coming home — no, that could not be yet. But next best to that it certainly was.

It was to tell me this — that *till* dear father and she returned, my home was to be with Myra, and I was to be Miss Fenmore's pupil too. Wherever Myra was, there I was to be — principally at her father's vicarage in the country, but some part of the year with her kind grandparents at Great Mexington. It was all settled and arranged — of course I did not trouble my head about the money part of it, though afterwards mamma told me that both Mr. and Mrs. Raby and the Cranstons had been most

exceedingly kind, making out that the advantage of a companion for their little girl would be so great that all the thanking should be on their side, though, of course, they respected father too much not to let him pay a proper share of all the expense. And it really cost less than my life at Green Bank, though father was now a good deal richer, and would not have minded paying a good deal more to ensure my happiness.

There is never so much story to tell when people are happy, and things go rightly; and the next year or two of my life, except of course for the separation from my dear parents, were *very* happy. Even though father's appointment in South America kept him and mamma out there for nearly three years instead of two, I was able to bear the disappointment in a very different way, with such kind and sympathising friends at hand to cheer me, so that there is nothing bitter or sad to look back to in that part of my childhood. Haddie spent the summer holidays with me, either at Crowley vicarage, or sometimes at the sea-side, where Miss Fenmore took care of us three. Once or twice he and I paid a visit to Mrs. Selwood, which we enjoyed pretty well, as we were together, though otherwise it was rather dull.

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And oh, how happy it was when father and mamma at last came home — no words can describe it. It was not *quite* unmixed pleasure — nothing ever is, the wise folk say — for there was the separation from Myra and her family. But after all, that turned out less than we feared. Miss Fenmore married soon after, and as father had now a good post in London, and we lived there, it was settled that Myra should be with us, and join in my lessons for a good part of the year, while I very often went back to Crowley with her for the summer holidays. And never without staying a few days at Great Mexington, to see Mr. and Mrs. Cranston and the lions!

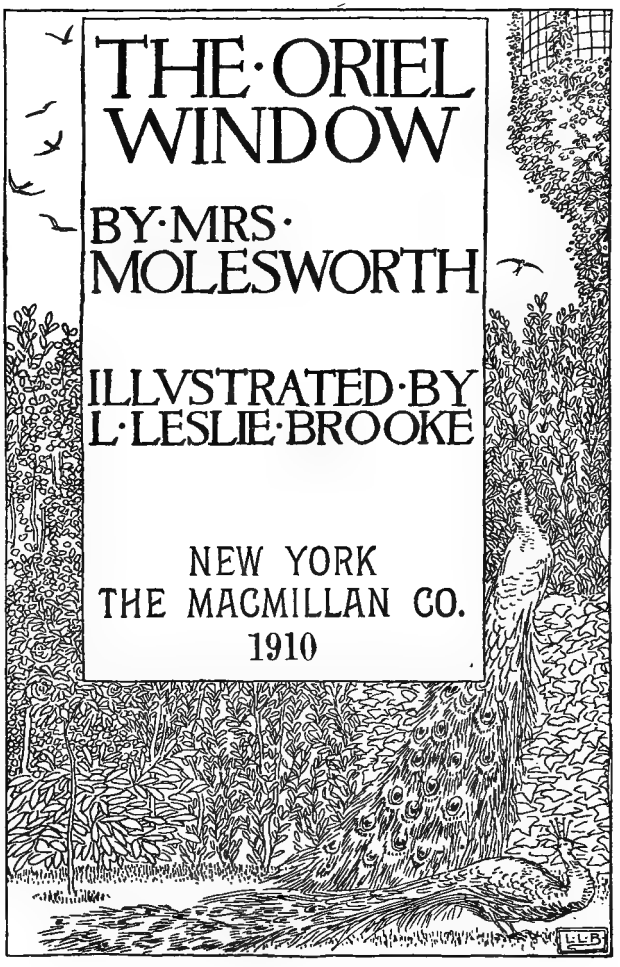
Many years have passed since I went there for the last time. Myra's grandparents have long been dead — my own dear father and mother are dead too, for I am growing quite old. My grandchildren are older now than I was when I ran away from the school at Green Bank. But once, while mamma was still alive and well, she and I together strolled through the streets of the grim town, which had for a time been our home, and lived over the old days again in fancy. I remember how tightly I clasped

her hand when we passed the corner where once was the old Quakeress's shop — all changed now — and walked down the street, still not very different from what it had been, where we used to live.

There was no use in going to Mr. Cranston's showrooms — they had long been done away with. But the lions are still to be seen. They stand in the hall of Myra's pretty house in the country, where she and Haddon, her husband, have lived for many years, ever since my brother left the army and they came home for good from India.

I spend a part of every year with them, for I am alone now. They want me to live with them altogether, but I cling to a little home of my own. Our grandchildren know the lions well, and stroke their smooth sides, and gaze up into their dark faces just as Myra and I used to do. So I promised them that sometime I would write out the simple story that I have now brought to a close.

THE END.


THE·ORIEL
WINDOW
BY·MRS·
MOLESWORTH
ILLVSTRATED·BY
L·LESLIE·BROOKE
NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN CO.
1910
L.L.B.

To

AMY AND ARTHUR

MY MUCH-ESTEEMED OPPOSITE NEIGHBOURS

19 Sumner Place, S.W.,
June, 1896.

THE ORIEL WINDOW

CHAPTER I

A HAPPY WAKING

I DO not think you could anywhere have found a happier little boy than Ferdy Ross when he woke on the morning of his ninth birthday.

He was always — at least almost always — happy, and he had good reason for being so. He had everything that children need to make life bright and joyous: kind parents, a dear sister, a pretty home, and, best of all, a loving, trusting, sunshiny nature, which made it easy for him to be very happy and loving, and made it easy too for others to love him in return and to feel pleasure in being with him. But to-day, his birthday, the fourteenth of May, he was very particularly, delightfully happy.

What a very long time it seemed that he and Chrissie had been looking forward to it! Ever

since Christmas, or New Year at least. That was how he and Chrissie had settled to do about their lookings-forwards. Chrissie's birthday was in September. She was a year and four months older than Ferdy, so it fitted in very well. As soon as her birthday was over they began the Christmas counting, and this in one way was the biggest of all the year, for their father's and mother's birthdays both came in Christmas week, and it had been found very convenient to "keep" them and Christmas Day together. So Christmas Day at Evercombe Watch House, which was Ferdy's home, was a very important day for more reasons than the great Christmas reasons which we all join in.

And then when Christmas time was over and Ferdy and Christine began to feel a little dull and unsettled, as children are pretty sure to do after a great deal of pleasure and fun, there was Ferdy's birthday to think of and prepare for; for it was not only just looking forward and counting the days, or rather the months first, and then the weeks and then the days to their "treat" times, that they divided the seasons into; there were

separate and different things to do, according to which of the three parts of the year it was. For Christmas, of course, there was the most to do — all the little things to get ready for the Christmas tree as well as the presents for papa and mamma and lots of other people. And for Ferdy's birthday Chrissie had always to make something which had to be done in secret, so that he should not know what it was; and for Chrissie's birthday it was Ferdy's turn to prepare some delightful surprise for her. He was very clever at making things, even though he was a boy! He was what is called "neat-handed," and as this little story goes on, you will see what a good thing it was that he had got into the way of amusing himself and using part of his playtime in carrying out some of his inventions and ideas.

"I don't know how I should bear it, Ferdy," Christine used to say sometimes, "if you were one of those tiresome boys that do nothing but fidget and tease their sisters when they want to sit still and work quietly for their dolls. Just think of Marcia Payne now. These two *horrible* boys, Ted and Eustace, think there is nothing so nice as to

snatch away her work and throw it into the fire or out of the window, or to nearly *kill* her poor dolls with their cruel tricks. I really don't know how poor Marcia ever gets their clothes made, for it takes *all* my time to keep my children tidy, even though you never worry me," and Chrissie sighed, for she was a very anxious-minded doll-mother.

Ferdy's presents to his sister were very often for her dolls, rather than for herself, though, like most mothers, it pleased her much more, she used to say, for her dear pets to be kindly treated than any attention to their little mamma could do.

She was very amusing about her dolls. She used to talk about them in such an "old-fashioned" way that if any grown-up person had overheard her, I think they would have laughed heartily. But Chrissie took care to keep all private conversation about her four girls and two sons for herself and Ferdy only.

Besides these *big* dolls, she had a large party of tiny ones who lived in the doll house, and I think Ferdy's prettiest presents were for this miniature family. These small people really were almost as

much his as Chrissie's, for he took the greatest interest in them, especially in their house and their carriages and horses and in all kinds of wonderful things he had made for them. Several of the doll-house rooms were entirely furnished by him, and he was builder and paper-hanger and cabinet-maker and upholsterer for Doll Hall, all in one. But now I think I must return to the history of his ninth birthday.

The fourteenth of May — just about the middle of the month which is the best loved, I almost think, of all the twelve. And oh it was such a lovely day! Ferdy woke early — though not quite as early as he had meant to do, for when he bade his sister good-night he told her he would be *sure* to knock at her door not later than five. But the sun was a good way up in the sky when he did wake — so far up indeed that Ferdy got quite a fright that he had overslept himself altogether, and it was a relief to see by the old clock which stood on the landing just outside his door that it was only half-past six.

"And after all," he said to himself, "now I come to think of it, I don't believe mamma would

have liked me to wake Chris so very early. I remember last year, on *her* birthday, she had a headache and was quite tired by the afternoon with having got up so soon."

He rubbed his eyes, — to tell the truth he was still rather sleepy himself, though it *was* his birthday, — and downstairs he heard the servants moving about and brushing the carpets. The schoolroom would certainly not be in order just yet; it never took him very long to have his bath and dress, and he knew by experience that housemaids are not the most amiable of human beings when little boys get in their way in the middle of their cleanings and dustings.

So on the whole Ferdy decided that the best thing to do was to go back to bed again and not get up till Flowers — Flowers was Chrissie's maid, and she looked after Ferdy too, since nurse had left to be married — came to wake him at his usual time, for he could hear no sound of any kind in his sister's room, though he listened well, outside the door.

It was very comfortable in bed, for May mornings, however lovely, are often chilly. And as

Ferdy lay there he could see out of the window, and enjoy the sight of the clear bright sunshine and the trees moving softly in the wind, their leaves glittering green and gold, and even silver, as the gentle breeze fluttered them about. The birds too, they were up and about of course; now and then there came quite a flight of them, and then one solitary soarer would cross the blue sky up at the very top of the window — he would see it for half a moment, and then it disappeared again. On the whole, he had more view of sky than of anything else from his bed, though when standing by the window he could see a good long way down the road, and, by craning his neck a little, some way across the fields past the church.

For the Watch House stood at the very end of the village, near the church, so that strangers often thought it must be the Vicarage, and envied the vicar for having such a charming home, whereas the real Vicarage was a pretty but small cottage-like house, quite at the other side of the church, and not nearly as old as it was, or as the Watch House was.

It, Ferdy's home, was very, very old. And the

story went that long ago some part of it had really been a kind of watch tower, though there was nothing remaining to show this except the name and the fact that you could, from the upper windows especially, see a very long way. The nicest window of all was one in Mrs. Ross's own sitting-room, or "boudoir," as it was sometimes called. This was a corner room on the floor just below the children's, and the beauty of it was this window, — an oriel window, — projecting beyond the wall, as such windows do, and so exactly at the corner that you could see, so to say, three ways at once when you were standing in it: right down the village street to begin with, and down the short cross-road which led to the church, and then over the fields between the two, to where Farmer Meare's duckpond jutted out into the lane — "the primrose lane" — as not only Ferdy and Christine but all the children of the neighbourhood had long ago named it. For here the first primroses were *always* to be found, year after year; they never forgot to smile up punctually with their little bright pale faces before you could see them anywhere else. Chrissie sometimes sus-

pected that the fairies had a hand in it. Everybody knows that the good people "favour" certain spots more than others, and perhaps Chrissie's idea was right.

Any way this oriel window was a charming watch tower. Ferdy always said that when he grew to be a man he would build a house with an oriel window at each corner.

But again I am wandering from the morning of Ferdy's birthday, when he lay in bed wide awake and gazed at as much as he could see of the outside world, that lovely May morning.

It *was* lovely, and everything alive seemed to be thinking so, as well as the little hero of the day — birds, trees, blossoms — even the insects that were beginning to find out that the warm days were coming, for a great fat blue-bottle was humming away with the loud summery hum which is the only nice thing about blue-bottles, I think. And not always nice either perhaps, to tell the truth. If one is busy learning some difficult lesson, or adding up long columns of figures, a blue-bottle's buzz is rather distracting. But this morning it was all right, seeming to give just the

touch of summer *sound* which was wanting to the perfection of Ferdy's happiness as he lay there, rather lazily, I am afraid we must confess — a little sleepy still perhaps.

What a nice beautiful place the world is, he thought to himself! How can people grumble at anything when the sun shines and everything seems so happy! In winter perhaps — well, yes, in winter, when it is very cold and grey, there *might* be something to be said on the other side, even though winter to such as Ferdy brings its own delights too. But in summer even the poor people should be happy; their cottages do look so pretty, almost prettier than big houses, with the nice little gardens in front, and roses and honeysuckle and traveller's joy climbing all over the walls and peeping in at the windows. Ferdy did not think he would at all mind living in a cottage, for Evercombe was a remarkably pretty village, and to all outside appearance the cottages were very neat and often picturesque, and the children had never been *inside* any except a few of the clean and nicely kept ones, where their mother knew that the people were good and re-

spectable. So they had little idea as yet of the discomfort and misery that may be found in some cottage homes even in the prettiest villages, though their father and mother knew this well, and meant that Ferdy and Christine should take their part before long in trying to help those in need of comfort or advice.

"I suppose," Ferdy went on thinking to himself —for once he got an idea in his head he had rather a trick of working it out—"I *suppose* there are some people who are really unhappy—poor people, who live in ugly dirty towns perhaps," and then his memory strayed to a day last year when he had driven with his father through the grim-looking streets of a mining village some distance from Evercombe. "That must be horrid. I wonder any one lives there! Or very old people who can't run about or scarcely walk, and who are quite deaf and nearly blind. Yes, they can't feel very happy. And yet they do sometimes. There's papa's old, old aunt; she seems as happy as anything, and yet I should *think* she's nearly a hundred, for she's grandpapa's aunt. She's not blind though; her eyes are quite bright and smily, and

she's not so very deaf. And then she's not poor. Perhaps if she was very poor — " but no, another aged friend came into his mind — old Barley, who lived with his already old daughter in the smallest and poorest cottage Ferdy had ever been in.

"And he's quite happy too," thought the little boy, "and so's poor Betsey, though she can't scarcely walk, 'cos of her rheumatism. It is rather funny that they are happy. The worst of all would be to be lame, *I* think — 'cept p'r'aps being blind. Oh dear! I *am* glad I'm not old, or lame, or blind, or things like that. But I say, I do believe the clock's striking seven, and — oh, there's Flowers! I might have run in to see Chrissie just for a minute or two first if I hadn't got thinking. I — " but then came an interruption.

An eager tap at the door, — not Flowers's tap he knew at once, — and in reply to his as eager "Come in" a rush of little bare feet across the floor, and Chrissie's arms round his neck in a real birthday hug.

"Flowers is just coming. I meant to wake *so* early. I've brought your present — mine's always the first, isn't it, darling?"

And Chrissie settled herself at the foot of the bed, curling up her cold toes, and drawing her pink flannel dressing-gown more closely round her that she might sit there in comfort and regale her eyes on her brother's delight as he carefully undid the many papers in which her present to him was enfolded.

It was a very pretty present, and Ferdy's natural good taste knew how to admire it, as his affectionate heart knew how to feel grateful to Chrissie for the real labour she had bestowed upon it. "It" was a writing-case, embroidered in silks of many lovely shades, and with a twisted monogram of Ferdy's initials — "F. W. R." — "Ferdinand Walter Ross" — worked in gold threads in the centre of the cover. It was a very good piece of work indeed for a little girl of Chrissie's age, and promised well for her skill and perseverance in days to come. Ferdy's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Oh, Chrissie," he said, "you've never made me anything quite as pretty as this! How clever you are getting, and how did you manage to work it all without my seeing?"

"It *was* rather difficult," said Chrissie, with satisfaction in her tone. "Ever so many times I had to bundle it away just as I heard you coming. And do you know, Ferdy, it's a very ancient pattern — no, pattern isn't the word I mean."

"Design?" said Ferdy. He knew some words of this kind better than Chrissie, as he was so often planning and copying carved wood and brasswork and such things.

"Yes, that's what I mean — it's a very ancient design. Miss Lilly drew it for me from an old book-cover somebody lent her, and she helped me to arrange the colours. I *am* so pleased you like it, Ferdy, darling. I liked doing it because it was such pretty work, but if it hadn't been a present for you, I think I would have got tired of it — it *was* rather fiddly sometimes. And after working ever, ever so long, I didn't seem to have done hardly any."

"I know," said Ferdy thoughtfully. "I think that's always the way with any really nice work. You can't scurry it up. And it wouldn't be worth anything if you could."

But just then there came a tap at the door, and Flowers's voice sounding rather reproachful.

"Miss Chrissie," she said, "I couldn't think where you'd gone to. I do hope you've got your dressing-gown and slippers on, or you will be sure to catch cold."

"All right, Flowers," said Chrissie, "I'm *quite* warm;" and as the maid caught sight of the little pink-flannelled figure her face cleared, for, fortunately for her peace of mind, the pink *toes* were discreetly curled up out of sight.

Who could expect a little girl to remember to put on her slippers on her brother's birthday morning, when she had been dreaming all night of the lovely present she had got for him?

"Many happy returns of the day, Master Ferdy, my dear," Flowers went on, growing rather red, "and will you please accept a very trifling present from me?"

She held out a little parcel as she spoke. It contained a *boy's* "housewife," if you ever saw such a thing. It was neatly made of leather, and held needles of different sizes, strong sewing cotton and thread, various kinds of useful buttons, a sturdy

little pair of scissors, pins, black and white, small and large, and several other things such as a schoolboy might be glad to find handy now and then.

"Mother always gives one to my brothers when they leave home," said the maid, "and I thought as no doubt Master Ferdy will be going to school some day—"

"It's capital, Flowers," Ferdy interrupted; "thank you ever so much; it's first-rate. I needn't wait till I go to school to use it. It's just the very thing I'm sure to want when I go yachting with papa next summer—this summer—in uncle's yacht. It's *capital!*"

And Flowers, who had not been very long at the Watch House, and had felt rather uncertain as to how her gift would suit the young gentleman's taste, smiled all over with pleasure.

Master Ferdy had certainly a very nice way with him, she thought to herself.

"Miss Christine," she said aloud, "you really must come and get dressed, or instead of being ready earlier than usual, you'll be ever so much later."

And Chrissie jumped down from the bed and went off to her own quarters.

CHAPTER II

THE PEACOCK'S CRY

HALF an hour or so later the children met again, and together made their way downstairs to the dining-room, Ferdy carefully carrying his presents, which had been increased by that of a nice big home-made cake from cook, and a smart little riding-whip from two or three of the other servants.

Papa and mamma had not yet made their appearance; it was barely half-past eight.

Ferdy's eyes and Chrissie's too wandered inquiringly round the room. Neither knew or had any sort of idea what *the* present of the day — their parents' — was to be. Many wonderings had there been about it, for Mrs. Ross had smiled in a very mysterious way once or twice lately, when something had been said about Ferdy's birthday, and the children had half expected to see some veiled package on the sideboard or in a corner of the room, ready for the right moment.

But everything looked much as usual, except that there was a lovely bouquet of flowers — hot-house flowers, the gardener's best — beside Ferdy's plate.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, as he took it up and sniffed it approvingly, "what a good humour Ferguson must be in to have given me these very best flowers. Why, he doesn't even like mamma herself to cut these big begonias. They *are* splendiferous, aren't they, Chris? I shall take one out for a button-hole, and wear it all day. But oh, Chrissie, I *do* wonder what papa's and mamma's present is going to be — don't you?"

"I should just think I did," his sister replied. "I haven't the very least inch of an idea this time, and generally, before, I have had *some*. It isn't in this room, any way."

"No, I expect it's some little thing, something mamma has kept safe in a drawer, a pair of gold sleeve-links, or, or — no, not a writing-case, for she'd know about yours. P'r'aps a pocket microscope or some book."

"Would you like any of those?" asked Chrissie.

"I'd like anything, I think. At least I mean

papa and mamma'd be sure to give me something nice. Of course, *the* present of presents would be — "

"We fixed not to speak about it, don't you remember?" said his sister quickly. "It's a bad habit to get into, that of fancying too much about impossible things you'd like to have."

"But this wouldn't be quite an impossible thing," said Ferdy. "I may get it some day, and one reason I want it so is that it would be just as nice for you as for me, you see, Chris."

"I know," said Christine. "Well no, it's not a couldn't-possibly-ever-be thing, like the magic carpet we planned so about once, or the table with lovely things to eat on it, that there's the fairy story about, though I always think that's rather a greedy sort of story — don't you?"

"Not if you were awfully hungry, and the boy in that story was, you know," said Ferdy. "But I didn't mean quite impossible in a fairy magic way. I mean that papa and mamma *might* do it some day, and it's rather been put into my head this morning by this," and he touched the riding-whip. "It's far too good for Jerry, or for any

donkey, isn't it? I shall put it away till I have a —"

Chrissie placed her hand on his mouth.

"Don't say it," she said. "It's much better not, after we fixed we wouldn't."

"Very well," said Ferdy resignedly. "I won't if you'd rather I didn't. Now let us think over what it really *will* be, most likely. A —"

But no other guess was to be put in words, for just then came the well-known voices.

"Ferdy, my boy" — "Dear little man," as his father and mother came in. "Many, many happy returns of your birthday," they both said together, stooping to kiss him.

"And see what Chrissie has given me, and Flowers, and cook, and the others!" exclaimed the boy, holding out his gifts for admiration.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross looked at each other and smiled. Neither of them had anything in the shape of a parcel big or little. Ferdy and Christine felt more and more puzzled.

"They are charming presents, dear," said Mrs. Ross, "and ours — papa's and mine — is quite ready. How are you going to do about it, Walter?"

"We had better have prayers first," Ferdy's father replied. "And — yes, breakfast too, I think, and then — "

In their own minds both Ferdy and Christine thought they would not be able to eat much breakfast while on the tenter-hooks of curiosity. But kind as their father was, he had a way of meaning what he said, and they had learned not to make objections. And, after all, they did manage to get through a very respectable meal, partly perhaps because the breakfast was particularly tempting that morning, and mamma was particularly anxious that the children should do justice to it.

Nice as it was, however, it came to an end in due time, and then, though they said nothing, the children's faces showed what was in their minds, Chrissie looking nearly as eager as her brother.

"Now," said Mr. Ross, taking out his watch, "I have just half an hour before I must start. Leila," — "Leila" was mamma's "girl name" as Chrissie called it, — "Leila, you keep these two young people quietly in here for five minutes by the clock. Then all three of you come round to the porch, but Ferdy must shut his eyes — tight, do you

hear, young man? Mother and Chrissie will lead you, and I will meet you at the front door."

Did ever five minutes pass so slowly? More than once the children thought that the clock must really have stopped, or that something extraordinary had happened to its hands, in spite of the ticking going on all right. But at last —

"We may go now," said mamma. "Shut your eyes, my boy. Now, Chris, you take one hand and I'll take the other. You won't open your eyes till papa tells you, will you, Ferdy?"

"No, no, I promise," said Ferdy.

But his mother looked at him a little anxiously. His little face was pale with excitement and his breath came fast. Yet he was not at all a delicate child, and he had never been ill in his life.

'Dear Ferdy," she said gently, "don't work yourself up so."

Ferdy smiled.

"No, mamma," he replied, though his voice trembled a little. "It is only — something we've tried not to think about, haven't we, Chrissie? Oh," he went on, turning to his sister, and speaking

almost in a whisper, "*do* you think it can be — you know what?"

Christine squeezed the hand she held; that was all she could reply. Though her face had got pink instead of pale like Ferdy's, she was almost as "worked up" as he was.

There was not long to wait, however. Another moment and they were all three standing in the porch, and though Ferdy's eyes were still most tightly and honourably shut, there scarcely needed papa's "Now," or the "*Oh!*" which in spite of herself escaped his sister, to reveal the delightful secret. For his ears had caught certain tell-tale sounds: a sort of "champing," and a rustle or scraping of the gravel on the drive which fitted in wonderfully with the idea which his brain was full of, though he had honestly tried to follow his sister's advice and not "think about it."

What was the "it"?

A pony — the most beautiful pony, or so he seemed to Ferdy and Christine at any rate — that ever was seen. There he stood, his bright brown coat gleaming in the May sunshine, his eager but kindly eyes looking as if they took it all in as he

rubbed his nose on Mr. Ross's coat-sleeve and twisted about a little, as if impatient to be introduced to his new master.

"Papa, mamma!" gasped Ferdy, with a sort of choke in his throat, and for a moment — what with the delight, and the sudden opening of his eyes in the strong clear sunshine — he felt half dazed. "Papa, mamma, a pony of my very own! And Chrissie can ride him too. He is a pony a girl can ride too, isn't he?" with a touch of anxiety.

"He is very gentle, and he has no vices at all," said his father. "I am quite sure Chrissie will be able to ride him too. But you must get to know him well in the first place."

Ferdy was out on the drive by this time, his face rosy with delight, as he stood by his father patting and petting the pretty creature. The pony was all saddled and bridled, ready for Ferdy to mount and ride "over the hills and far away." The boy glanced up at Mr. Ross, an unspoken request trembling on his lips.

"Yes," said his father, seeing it there and smiling. "Yes, you may mount him and ride up and down a little. He'll be all right," he added, turn-

ing to the coachman, who had been standing by and enjoying the whole as much as any of them.

"Oh yes, sir. He's a bit eager, but as gentle as a lamb," the man replied.

"And this afternoon," Ferdy's father continued, "if I can get home between four and five, I'll take you a good long ride — round by Durnham and past by Mellway Sight, where you have so often wanted to go."

"Oh, papa," was all Ferdy could get out.

Merton meanwhile had been examining the stirrup straps.

"They're about the right length for you, I think, sir," he said, and then in a moment Ferdy was mounted.

Pony pranced about a little, just a very little, — he would not have seemed a real live pony if he had not, — but nothing to mind. Indeed, Ferdy, to tell the truth, would have enjoyed a little more. The coachman led him a short way along the drive, but then let go, and Ferdy trotted to the gates in grand style and back again.

"Isn't he *perfect*, Chris?" he exclaimed as he came up to the group in front of the porch.

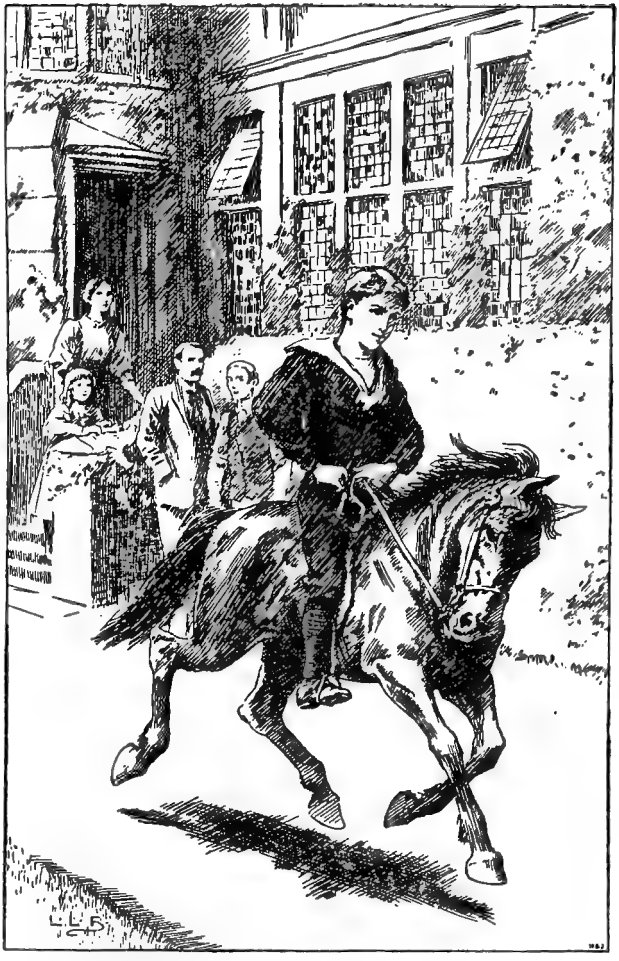
"Mayn't I gallop him, papa, this afternoon when we go out? Round by Mellway there's beautiful grass, you know."

"All right," Mr. Ross replied. "We shall see how you get on outside on the road. I don't know that he has any tricks, but every pony has *some* fad, so for a few days we must just be a little cautious. Now trot back to the gates once more, and then I think you had better dismount for the present. You may go round to the stable with him. It's always a good thing for your horse to know you in the stable as well as outside."

Off Ferdy went again, a little bit faster this time, his spirits rising higher and higher. Then he turned to come back to the house, and his mother was just stepping indoors, her face still lighted up with pleasure, when there came a sudden cry,—a curious hoarse cry,—but for a moment she was not startled.

"It is the peacocks," she thought, for there were a couple of beautiful peacocks at the Watch House. "I hope they won't frighten the pony."

For the peacocks were allowed to stalk all about the grounds, and they were well-behaved on the



OFF FEEDY WENT AGAIN, A LITTLE BIT FASTER THIS TIME.—P. 26

whole; though, as is always the case with these birds, their harsh cry was not pleasant, and even startling to those not accustomed to it.

Was it the cry, or was it the sudden sight of them as they came all at once into view on a side-path which met the drive just where Ferdy was passing?

Nobody ever knew, — probably pony himself could not have told which it was, — but as Mrs. Ross instinctively stopped a moment on her way into the house, another sound seemed to mingle with the peacock's scream, or rather to grow out from it — a sort of stifled shriek of terror and rushing alarm. Then came voices, trampling feet, a kind of wail from Chrissie, and in an instant — an instant that seemed a lifetime — Ferdy's mother saw what it was. He had been thrown, and one foot had caught in the stirrup, and the startled pony was dragging him along. A moment or two of sickening horror, then a sort of silence. One of the men was holding the pony, Mr. Ross and the coachman were stooping over something that lay on the ground a little way up the drive — something — what was it? It did not move. Was it only a heap of clothes that had dropped there

somehow? It couldn't, oh no, it *couldn't* be Ferdy! *Ferdy* was alive and well. He had just been laughing and shouting in his exceeding happiness. Where had he run to?

"Ferdy, Ferdy!" his mother exclaimed, scarcely knowing that she spoke; "Ferdy dear, come quick, come, Ferdy."

But Chrissie caught her, and buried her own terror-stricken face in her mother's skirts.

"Mamma, mamma," she moaned, "don't look like that. Mamma, don't you see? Ferdy's *killed.* That's Ferdy where papa is. Don't go, oh don't go, mamma! Mamma, I can't bear it. Hide me, hide my eyes."

And at this frantic appeal from the poor little half-maddened sister, Mrs. Ross's strength and sense came back to her as if by magic. She unclasped Chrissie's clutching hands gently but firmly.

"Run upstairs and call Flowers. Tell her to lay a mattress on the floor of the oriel room at once; it is such a little way upstairs; and tell Burt to bring some brandy at once — brandy and water. Tell Burt first."

Chrissie was gone in an instant. Ferdy couldn't

be dead, she thought, if mamma wanted brandy for him. But when the mother, nerved by love, flew along the drive to the spot where her husband and the coachman were still bending over what still was, or had been, her Ferdy, she could scarcely keep back a scream of anguish. For a moment she was sure that Chrissie's first words were true — he was killed.

"Walter, Walter, tell me quick," she gasped. "Is he — is he alive?"

Mr. Ross looked up, his own face so deadly pale, his lips so drawn and quivering, that a rush of pity for *him* came over her.

"I — I don't know. I can't tell. What do you think, Merton?" he said, in a strange dazed voice. "He has not moved, but we thought he was breathing at first."

The coachman lifted his usually ruddy face; it seemed all streaked, red and white in patches.

"I can feel his heart, sir; I feel fairly sure I can feel his heart. If we could get a drop or two of brandy down his throat, and — yes, I think I can slip my arm under his head. There's Burt coming with some water."

"And brandy," said Mrs. Ross. "Here, give it me — a spoon — yes, that's right. And, Walter, have you sent for the doctor?"

Mr. Ross passed his hand over his forehead, as if trying to collect himself.

"I will send Larkins now," he said, "on the pony — that will be the quickest," though a sort of shudder passed over him as he spoke of the innocent cause of this misery. "Larkins, go at once for Mr. Stern; you know the shortest way," for there was no doctor within a mile or two of Evercombe village, and Mr. Ross raised himself to give exact directions to the young groom.

When he turned again they had succeeded in getting a spoonful of brandy and water between Ferdy's closed lips — then another; then poor old Merton looked up with a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"He's coming to, sir — ma'am — I do believe," he said.

He was right. A quiver ran through the little frame, then came the sound of a deep sigh, and Ferdy's eyes opened slowly. They opened and — it was like Ferdy — the first sign he gave of re-

turning consciousness was a smile — a very sweet smile.

"Papa, mamma," he whispered, "is it time to get up? Is it — my birthday?"

That was too much for his mother. The tears she had been keeping back rushed to her eyes, but they were partly tears of joy. Her boy was alive; at worst he was not killed, and perhaps, oh *perhaps*, he was not badly hurt.

Ferdy caught sight of her tears, though she had turned her face away in hopes of hiding them. A pained, puzzled look came over him. He tried to raise his head, which was resting on Merton's arm, but it sank down again weakly; then he glanced at his left arm and hand, which were covered with blood from a cut on his forehead.

"What is the — mamma, why are you crying?" he said. "Have I hurt myself? Oh dear, did I fall off my beautiful pony? I am so, *so* sorry."

"My darling," said his mother, "it was an accident. I hope you will soon be better. Have you any pain anywhere?"

"I don't think so," said he, "only I wish I was in bed, mamma. What is it that is bleeding?"

"Nothing very bad, sir," said Merton cheerfully; "only a cut on your forehead. But that'll soon heal. Your handkerchief, please, ma'am, dipped in cold water."

"Yes," said Mr. Ross, "that is the best thing for the moment," and he folded the handkerchief up into a little pad, which he soaked in the fresh cold water, and laid it on the place. "I think we must move him," he went on. "Ferdy, my boy, will you let us try?"

Ferdy stretched out his right arm and put it round his father's neck. But the movement hurt somehow and somewhere, for he grew terribly white again.

"My back," he whispered.

A thrill of new anguish went through his parents at the words.

"Don't do anything yourself," said Mr. Ross; "lie quite still and trust to me."

Ferdy closed his eyes without speaking, and skilfully, though with infinite pains, his father raised him in his arms, Ferdy making no sound — perhaps he half fainted again; there he lay quite helpless, like a little baby, as with slow, careful

tread Mr. Ross made his way to the house, from which, not a quarter of an hour ago, the boy had flown out in perfect health and joy.

At the door they met Chrissie. She started violently, then covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, papa," she began, but her mother was close behind and caught her in her arms.

"Hush, dear," she said. "No, no," in answer to the little girl's unuttered question. "Ferdy has opened his eyes and spoken to us; he knew us—papa and me."

Chrissie's terrors at once made place for hope. Her white face flushed all over.

"He's spoken to you, mamma? What did he say? Oh, then he can't be so *very* badly hurt. Oh, *mamma*, how glad I am!"

"Be very, very quiet, dear. We can do nothing, and be sure of nothing, till the doctor comes, but—oh yes, thank God, we may hope."

But by the time they had laid him on the mattress in the oriel room Ferdy looked again so ghastly pale that the poor mother's heart went down. There was little they could do; they scarcely dared to undress him till the surgeon

came. It was a terrible hour or two's waiting, for Mr. Stern was out, and Larkins had to ride some considerable way before he caught him up on his morning rounds.

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE BIRTHDAY

LATE on the afternoon of that sad day the doctor, coming out of the oriel room, was met by little Christine. She had been watching for him on the stairs. It was his second visit since the morning, and his face was very grave; but its expression altered at once when he caught sight of Chrissie. Though Stern by name, he was very far from stern by nature, and he was very fond of the Ross children, whom he had known nearly all their lives. Besides, it is a doctor's business to cheer up people as much as possible, and he was touched by poor Chrissie's white face. Never had the little girl spent such a miserable day, and thankful though she had been that her darling Ferdy's life had been spared, she was beginning to doubt if after all he *was* going to get better. Her mother had scarcely left him for an instant; she had been busy arranging the room for him, or

rather she had been sitting beside him holding his hand while she gave directions to the servants.

By the doctor's advice Ferdy's own little bed had been brought into the room, and he himself moved on to it, lifted upon the mattress as he lay; and it had, of course, been necessary to carry out some of the other furniture and rearrange things a little. This would not disturb Ferdy, Mr. Stern said, but Ferdy's head was now aching from the cut on his forehead, though it was not a very bad one, and he was tired and yet restless, and could not bear his mother to move away.

So there she sat, and Mr. Ross had gone off to Whittingham by a mid-day train, and no one had given much thought to poor Christine.

"My dear child," said the doctor, "how ill you look! Have you been wandering about by yourself all day?"

"Yes," said Chrissie simply, her lip quivering as she spoke. "There was nothing I could do to help, and they were all busy."

"Where is Miss Lilly?" asked Mr. Stern.

"She wasn't coming to-day. We were to have a holiday. It—it is Ferdy's birthday, you know,

and we were going to be so happy. *Oh*," she cried, as if she could keep back the misery no longer, "to think it is Ferdy's birthday!" and she burst again into deep though not loud sobbing.

Mr. Stern was very, very sorry for her.

"Dear Chrissie," he said, "you must not make yourself ill. In a day or two you will be wanted very much indeed, and you must be ready for it. Your brother will want you nearly all day long."

Chrissie's sobs stopped as if by magic, though they still caught her breath a little, and her face grew all pink and rosy.

"Will he, *will* he?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean that he is really going to get better? I thought—I thought—mamma kept shut up in the room, and nobody would tell me—do you really think he is going to get better soon?"

Mr. Stern took her hand and led her downstairs, and then into the library. There was no one there, but he closed the door.

"My dear child," he said, "I will tell you all I can," for he knew that Christine was a sensible little girl, and he knew that anything was better

than to have her working herself up more and more with miserable fears. "I think Ferdy will be *better* in a day or two, but we cannot say anything yet about his getting *well*. Your father has gone to Whittingham to see one of the best doctors, and ask him to come down here to-night or to-morrow to examine your brother, and after that we shall know more. But I am afraid it is very likely that he will have to stay in bed a long time, and if so, you know how much you can do to make the days pass pleasantly for him."

Chrissie's eyes sparkled through the tears still there. "I don't mind that," she began. "Of course I know it will be very dull and tiresome for him, but *nothing* seems very bad compared with if he was going to — " she stopped short, and again she grew very white. "Oh, you are *sure* he isn't going to get worse?" she exclaimed. "I do get so frightened every now and then when I think of how his face looked, and it was bleeding too."

Mr. Stern patted her hand.

"You have not seen him since this morning?" he said.

Chrissie shook her head.

"Not since papa carried him in," she replied.

"Would you like to see him very much?"

"Oh, *may* I? I'll be very, very quiet and good. I'll bathe my eyes, so that he won't find out I've been crying, and I'll only stay a minute."

"Run upstairs then and make yourself look as much as usual as you can. I will go back for a moment and tell Mrs. Ross I have given you leave to come in."

Two minutes or so later Chrissie was tapping very softly at the door of the oriel room.

"Come in," said Mr. Stern.

He was not looking at all grave now, but very "smily" and cheerful, which Chrissie was glad of, as it reminded her that she herself must not cry or seem unhappy. But how strange it all was! She would scarcely have known the pretty little sitting-room: Ferdy's bed with a screen round it standing out at one side of the curiously shaped window, her mother's writing-table and other little things gone. Chrissie could not help staring round in surprise, and perhaps because she had a nervous dread of looking at Ferdy.

He saw her, however, at once.

"Chrissie," said a weak, rather hoarse little voice, "Chrissie, come here."

Chrissie choked down the lump in her throat that was beginning to make itself felt again.

"Kiss me," he said when she was close beside him. He did not look so unlike himself now, though there was a bandage round his forehead and he was very pale. "Kiss me," he said again, and as she stooped down to do so, without speaking, "Chrissie," he whispered, "I don't want mamma to hear — Chrissie, just to think it's my birthday and that it's all through our great wish coming true. Oh, Chrissie!"

The little girl felt, though she could not see him, that Mr. Stern was watching her, so she made a great effort.

"I know," she whispered back again, and even into her whisper she managed to put a cheerful sound. "I know, Ferdy darling. But you're going to get better. And you haven't any very bad pains, have you?"

"Not very bad," he replied. "My head's sore, but I daresay it'll be better to-morrow. But that

won't make it right, you see, Chrissie. It's it being my birthday I mind."

Christine did not know what to say. Her eyes were filling with tears, and she was afraid of Ferdy seeing them. She turned away a little, and as she did so her glance fell on the window, one side of which looked to the west. She and Ferdy had often watched the sunset from there. It was too early yet for that, but signs of its coming near were beginning; already the lovely mingling of colours was gleaming faintly as if behind a gauzy curtain.

"Ferdy," said Chrissie suddenly, "I think there's going to be a beautiful sunset, and you can see it lovelily the way you're lying. Aren't you awfully glad you're in here? It wouldn't be half so nice in your own room for seeing out, would it?"

"No, it wouldn't," said Ferdy, more brightly than he had yet spoken. "I can't move my head, only the least bit, but I can see out. Yes, Chrissie, I can see the people on the road — I mean I could if the curtain was a little more pulled back."

"Of course you could," said Mr. Stern, coming forward. "But you must wait till to-morrow to try how much you can see."

"Shall I have to stay in bed all to-morrow?" said Ferdy.

"We must hear what the big doctor says," Mr. Stern replied, for he had already told Ferdy that another surgeon was coming to see him, so that the sudden sight of a stranger should not startle the little fellow. "Now, Chrissie, my dear, I think you must say good-night; you shall see much more of Ferdy to-morrow, I hope."

They kissed each other again, and Chrissie whispered, "Don't mind about its being your birthday, darling. Think how much worse you might have been hurt."

"I know. I *might* have been killed," said Ferdy in a very solemn tone.

"And do watch the sunset. I think it's going to be extra pretty," Chrissie went on cheerfully. "If you *have* to stay in bed, Ferdy, it will be nice to have this lovely window."

And Ferdy's face grew decidedly brighter.

"Good little woman," said the doctor in a low voice as she passed him, and by the way mamma kissed her Chrissie knew that she too was pleased with her.

So the little sister was not altogether miserable as she fell asleep that night, and she was so tired out that she slept soundly — more heavily indeed than usual. She did not hear the sound of wheels driving up to the house soon after she had gone to bed, and this was a good thing, for she would have guessed they were those of the carriage bringing her father and the doctor he had gone to fetch, from the station, and her anxiety would very likely have sent away her sleepiness.

Nor did she hear the carriage drive away again an hour or two later. By that time she was very deeply engaged, for she was having a curious and very interesting dream. She had forgotten it when she woke in the morning, but it came back to her memory afterwards, as you will hear.

Ferdy did not much like the strange doctor, though he meant to be very kind, no doubt. He spoke to him too much as if he were a baby, and the boy was beginning at last to feel less restless and more comfortably sleepy when this new visitor came. And then the library lamp was brought up, and it blinked into his eyes, and he hated

being turned round and having his backbone poked at, as he told Chrissie, though he couldn't exactly say that it hurt him. And, worst of all, when he asked if he might get up "to-morrow" the strange doctor "put him off" in what Ferdy thought a silly sort of way. He would much rather have been told right out, "No, certainly not to-morrow," and then he could have begun settling up things in his mind and planning what he would do, as Chrissie and he always did if they knew a day in bed was before them; for they had never been very ill — never ill enough to make no plans and feel as if they cared for nothing in bed or out of it.

No, Ferdy was quite sure he liked Mr. Stern much better than Dr. Bigge, for, curiously enough, that was the great doctor's name, though by rights, as he was a very clever surgeon and not a physician, I suppose he should not be called "doctor" at all.

When at last he had gone, Mr. Stern came back for a moment to tell Ferdy's mother and Flowers how it would be best to settle him for the night. They put the pillows in rather a funny

way, he thought, but still he was pretty comfortable, and he began to feel a little sleepy again; and just as he was going to ask his mother what they were doing with the sofa, everything went out of his head, and he was off into the peaceful country of sleep, where his troubles were all forgotten, hushed into quiet by the soft waving wings of the white angel, whose presence is never so welcome as to the weary and suffering.

When he woke next there was a faint light in the room. For a moment or two he thought that it was the daylight beginning to come, and he looked towards where the window was in his own little room; but even the tiny motion of his head on the pillow sent a sort of ache through him, and that made him remember.

No, he was not in his own room, and the glimmer was not that of the dawn. It was from a shaded night-light in one corner, and as his eyes grew used to it he saw that there was some one lying on the sofa — some one with bright brown hair, bright even in the faint light, and dressed in a pale pink dressing-gown. It was mamma. Poor mamma, how uncomfortable for her not to

be properly in bed! Why was she lying there? He hoped she was asleep, and yet—he almost hoped she wasn't, or at least that she would awake just for a minute, for he was thirsty and hot, and the fidgety feeling that he *couldn't* keep still was beginning again. He did not know that he sighed or made any sound, but he must have done so, for in another moment the pink dressing-gown started up from the sofa, and then mamma's pretty face, her blue eyes still looking rather "dusty," as the children called it, with sleep, was anxiously bending over him.

"What is it, dear? Did you call me?"

"No, mamma. But why aren't you in bed, and why is there a light in the room? Aren't you going to bed?"

"Yes, in an hour or two Flowers will come and take my place. You see we thought you might be thirsty in the night, and the doctor said you mustn't move."

"I *am* thirsty," said Ferdy. "I'd like a drink of water."

"Better than lemonade? There is some nice fresh lemonade here."

"WHAT IS IT, DEAR? DID YOU CALL ME?"—P. 46.

Ferdy's eyes brightened.

"Oh, I *would* like that best, but I didn't know there was any."

Mamma poured some out into such a funny cup —it had a pipe, so Ferdy called it, at one side. He didn't need to sit up, or even to lift his head, to drink quite comfortably.

"And I think," Mrs. Ross went on, "I think I will give you another spoonful of the medicine. It is not disagreeable to take, and it will help you to go to sleep again."

Yes, it did; very, very soon he was asleep again. This time he dreamt something, though when he awoke he could not clearly remember what. He only knew that it was something about birds. He lay with his eyes shut thinking about it for a few minutes, till a sound close to him made him open them and look round. It was morning, quite morning and daylight, and from the window came the gentle twittering of some swallows, who had evidently taken up their summer quarters in some corner hard by.

"That must have been what made me dream about birds," said Ferdy to himself, though he

spoke aloud without knowing it. "I must have heard them in my sleep."

"You have had a nice sleep," said a voice from the other side of his bed, and, looking towards her, Ferdy saw Flowers, already dressed and with a pleasant smile on her face. "Are you feeling better, Master Ferdy, dear?"

The little boy waited a moment or two before he replied.

"My head isn't so sore, and I'm not so tired, but I don't think I want to get up even if I might. I want Chrissie to come and sit beside me. What o'clock is it, Flowers?"

"Just six o'clock, sir. You will have to wait a little before Miss Christine can come. I daresay she's tired, poor dear, and she may sleep late this morning; perhaps you will be able to sleep a little more yourself, Master Ferdy. Would you like a drink of milk?"

"Yes," said Ferdy, "I would like some milk, but I can't go to sleep again; I've too much on my mind," with a deep sigh.

He spoke in such an "old-fashioned" way that, sorry as the maid was for him, she could scarcely

help smiling a little. She gave him the milk and lifted him very, very gently a little farther on to the pillows.

"Does it hurt you, Master Ferdy?" she asked anxiously.

"N—no, I don't think so," he replied; "but I feel all queer. I believe all my bones have got put wrong, and p'r'aps they'll never grow right again."

"Never's a long word, my dear," said Flowers cheerfully. The truth was she scarcely knew what to say, and she was glad to turn away and busy herself with some little tidying up at the other side of the room.

Ferdy lay still, almost forgetting he was not alone in the room, for Flowers was very quiet. His eyes strayed to the window, where another lovely sunshiny morning was gilding again the world of trees, and grass, and blossom with renewed beauty. It was all so very like yesterday morning, all "except me," thought Ferdy, so terribly like his birthday morning, when he had been so happy, oh! so happy, that it had been difficult to believe in unhappiness anywhere. And yet even then

he had thought of unhappiness. It was queer that he had. What had put it into his head? He remembered it all — wondering how very poor, or very old, or very suffering people, cripples, for instance, could be happy. And yet he had seen some that really seemed so.

"Cripples" — that word had never come into his mind in the same way before. He had never thought what it really meant. Supposing *he* were to be a cripple? Was it for fear of that that the doctor would not let him get up? Ferdy moved his legs about a very little; they did not hurt him, only they felt weak and heavy, and he had a kind of shrinking from the idea of standing, or even of sitting up in bed.

Was that how cripples felt? He wished somebody would tell him, but it was no use asking Flowers — most likely she did not know. And he didn't think he would like to ask his mother; she looked so pale and tired, and it might make her cry if he spoke about being a cripple. He thought he might ask Chrissie, perhaps. She was only a little girl, but she was very sensible, and he could speak to her without being so afraid

of making her cry as if it was mamma — or rather, if she did cry, he wouldn't mind quite so much.

He wished Chrissie would come. Only six o'clock Flowers had said, not so very long ago. It couldn't be more than half-past six yet. What a pity it was that people, boys and girls any way, can't get up like the birds, just when it gets nice and light! What a chatter and twitter those birds outside were making — he had never noticed them so much before. But then, to be sure, he had never slept in the oriel room before. He wondered if they were the same swallows that were there last year, and every year.

"If they are," thought Ferdy, "I should think they must have got to know us. I wish they could talk to us and tell us stories of all the places they see when they are travelling. What fun it would be! I'll ask Chrissie if she's ever thought about it. I wonder if we couldn't ever get to — under — stand — "

But here the thread of his wonderings was suddenly snapped. Ferdy had fallen asleep again.

A minute or two after, Flowers stepped softly

across the room and stood beside the bed looking down at him.

"Poor dear," she said to herself, "he does look sweet lying there asleep. And to see him as he is now, no one would think there was anything the matter with him. Oh dear, I do hope it won't turn out so bad as the doctors fear."

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE SWALLOWS THOUGHT OF IT

THANKS to the extra sleep which had come to Ferdy after all, he had not long to wait for Chrissie once he had wakened up "for good." She was not allowed to see him till he had had his breakfast, for it was very important to keep up his strength with nourishing food, and "if you begin talking together, you know," said mamma, "Ferdy would get interested and excited, and very likely not feel inclined to eat anything. That is even the way sometimes when you are both quite well."

She was speaking to Chrissie about how careful she must be, if she were to be trusted to be with her brother, not to seem sad or dull, and yet to be very quiet — "quietly cheerful, dear," she went on, "and if Ferdy is at all cross or peevish, you must just not mind."

Chrissie looked up in surprise. Ferdy cross or peevish seemed impossible.

"He never is, mamma dear," she said. "If ever we have little quarrels, it is almost always more my fault than his," which was quite true.

"Yes," her mother replied, "but you don't know, Chrissie, how illness changes people. Ferdy never has been seriously ill in his life, and — and this sad accident is sure to tell on his nerves." She had been doing her best to speak cheerfully, but now her voice broke, and the tears came into her eyes, already worn and tired-looking with the long hours of anxiety.

Chrissie stroked her hand gently. Then she said, though hesitating a little, "Mamma darling, won't you tell me more about Ferdy — about what the doctors think, I mean. I promise you I will not let him find out anything you don't want him to know. I will be very brave and — and cheerful, but I would so like to know. It isn't that he's not going to get better — that he's going to get *worse?*"

"No, dear, not that," said Mrs. Ross, drying her eyes as she spoke. "He is a strong child.

and his general health is good, but his back is injured badly. That is the reason we are so anxious. He may get *better*. The doctors think that in a few weeks he will be able to be up and dressed and to lie on a couch, but they cannot say if he will ever be *quite* right again. I am afraid they do not think he ever will."

"Oh, mamma," said Chrissie.

Mrs. Ross looked at her anxiously; she wondered if she had done wrong in telling her so much. And the little girl guessed what she was thinking.

"I would much rather know, mamma," she said, —"much rather. It will make me more careful when I am with dear Ferdy, and if he ever is the least cross, I won't mind. I will try to amuse him nicely. Are you going to tell Miss Lilly, mamma?"

"Oh yes, I am hoping that she will be a great help. I will see her this morning as soon as she comes."

"Are we to do any lessons to-day?" asked Chrissie. "Is Ferdy to do lessons in bed?"

"In a few days perhaps he may," said Mrs. Ross. "He will seem better in a few days, for he

has had a great shock besides the hurt to his back, and he must have time to get over it; but I think you had better do *some* lessons, Chrissie — those that you have separately from Ferdy. Flowers or I will sit beside him a good part of the day, and I hope he will sleep a good deal. If he does not seem much better in a day or two we shall have to get a nurse."

"Oh, I hope not," said Chrissie. "Ferdy wouldn't like a stranger."

"Well, we shall see," said Mrs. Ross. "Now you may go to Ferdy, dear."

And Chrissie ran off. She was startled, but still not *very* sad. She was so delighted to be with her brother again after a whole day's separation, and proud too of being trusted to take care of him. But it was going to be more difficult for her than she knew, for, as you will remember, Ferdy had made up his mind to ask Christine if she could tell him what the doctors really thought of him.

He looked so much better than the day before that she could scarcely believe there was much the matter, and he looked still better when he

caught sight of her — his whole face lighted up with smiles.

"Oh, Chrissie," he called out, "how glad I am you've come! It seems such a long time since I saw you. You do look so nice this morning."

So she did — she was a very pretty little girl, especially when her cheeks were rosy and her eyes bright, as they were just now.

"*You* look much better too, Ferdy," she said, — "quite different from yesterday. Have you had a good night?"

"*Pretty* good," said Ferdy in rather a melancholy tone. "I am getting tired of staying in bed."

Chrissie's heart sank — "tired of staying in bed," and this scarcely the second day of it! What would he do if it went on for weeks — perhaps months? She felt glad, however, that she knew the truth; it would make her be very careful in what she said.

"I wouldn't mind so much," he went on, "if I knew how long it'd be. And I don't like to ask mamma for fear of making her sad, *in case* it was to be for a long while. Chrissie," and here he fixed his blue eyes — so like his mother's — on his sis-

ter's face, "*do* you think it'll be a very long while? Do you think," and his voice grew still more solemn, "that p'r'aps I'll never be able to stand or walk again?"

Chrissie's heart was beating fast. She was so glad to be able with truth to answer cheerfully.

"Oh no, Ferdy dear. I really do think you'll be able to get up and be dressed before very long. But I should think the quieter you keep just now the quicker you'll get better. And it's so nice in this room, and you can see so nicely out of the window. You don't want to get up just yet, do you — not till you feel stronger? Mamma says you'll feel much stronger in a few days."

"Does she?" said Ferdy, brightening; "then the doctors must have told her. I'm so glad. No, I don't really want to get up — at least I don't feel as if I *could* — that's what bothers me. I am not sorry in my body to stay in bed, but in my mind I'm all in a fidget. I keep fancying things," and he hesitated.

"What sort of things?" asked Chrissie. She had a feeling that it was better for him to tell her all that was on his mind.

He tried to do so. He told her how the day before, when he was quite well and so very happy, his thoughts had somehow wandered to people whose lives were very different from his, and how this morning these thoughts had come back again, the same yet different.

"Chrissie," he said, "I don't think I could bear it if I was never to get well again."

It was very hard for the little sister to keep her self-control. If Mrs. Ross had known how Ferdy was going to talk to Chrissie, very probably she would not have told her all she had done. But Chrissie seemed to have grown years older in a few hours.

"And yet there must be lots of people who do bear it — just what you were saying yourself," said Chrissie thoughtfully. "I suppose they get accustomed to it."

"I think it must be more than getting accustomed to make them really seem happy," said Ferdy. "P'r'aps it's something to do with not being selfish."

"Yes," said Chrissie, "I'm sure it has. You see they'd know that if they always seemed unhappy

it would make their friends unhappy too. And then —"

"What?" said Ferdy.

"I was only thinking that mamma says people can always do *something* for other people. And that makes you happier yourself than anything, you know, Ferdy."

Ferdy lay still, thinking.

"That was partly what was in my mind," he said at last. "Such lots of thinkings have come since yesterday, Chrissie — you'd hardly believe. I was thinking that *supposing* I could never run about, or do things like other boys, what a trouble I'd be to everybody, and no good."

"I don't think you need think of things that way," said his sister. "Papa and mamma love you too much ever to think you a trouble, and I'm sure you *could* be of good somehow. But I don't think you should begin puzzling about things when you're really not better yet; you'll make your head ache, and then they might think it was my fault. Oh, Ferdy," suddenly, "I had such a funny dream last night."

"I dreamt something too," said Ferdy, "but I

couldn't remember what it was. It was something about —"

"Mine was about birds," interrupted Christine, "about the swallows who have a nest just over the oriel window. I thought —"

"How *very* funny!" exclaimed Ferdy, interrupting in his turn, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "I do believe mine was too. I knew it was about birds, but I couldn't get hold of the rest of it. And now I seem to remember more, and I know I was thinking about those swallows when I fell asleep. I was wishing I could understand what they mean when they twitter and chirp. Tell me your dream, Chris; perhaps it'll make me remember mine."

Christine was delighted to see that Ferdy's thoughts were turned from melancholy things — only — there was something about him in her dream. She hoped it wouldn't make him sad again.

"I dreamt I was walking in the garden," she said, "down there on the path just below this window. I was alone, and somehow even in my dream I knew there was something the matter. It

seemed to be either late in the evening or very early in the morning, I'm not sure which, but it wasn't quite light, and there was a funny, dreamy sort of look in the sky—"

"What colour?" asked Ferdy.

"All shaded," said Chrissie, "something like mother-of-pearl. I've seen it in a picture, but never *quite* like that in the real sky, though the real sky is so very beautiful."

"That's just because it was a dream," said Ferdy sagely. "You never see things *really* the same as you do in dreams. That's what makes dreams so nice, I suppose,—nice dreams I mean,—but I've sometimes felt more unhappy in dreams than ever I did awake."

"So have I," said Chrissie.

"Well, go on," said Ferdy, "it sounds rather nice. You were walking along and the sky was so wonderful?"

"Yes," continued Chrissie, "I was looking up at it, and not thinking a bit about you being ill, and then all of a sudden I heard something rustling up over my head, and then a twittering and chirping, and I knew it was the swallows come

back, and then I got the feeling still more that there was something the matter, and I began wondering if the swallows knew and were talking about it — their chirping got to sound so like talking. And at last, standing quite still and almost holding my breath to listen, I began to make out what they were saying. The first thing I heard was, 'It's rather sad to have come back to this,' and then another voice said, 'I don't like peacocks; vain, silly birds; they have no hearts; not like us; everybody knows how much we mind what happens to our friends.' And when I heard that, Ferdy, it made me think of the poetry we were learning last week, about the swallows coming back, you know, and the changes they found."

"I daresay it was that made you dream it," said Ferdy.

Christine looked rather disappointed.

"No, we won't think that, then," said he, correcting himself as he noticed his sister's face, "it's really very interesting — 'specially as I know I dreamt something like it that I've forgotten. What more did the swallows say?"

"The other voice said something I couldn't hear. It sounded as if one was inside the nest, and the other outside. And then the first one said, 'Well, we'll do our best to cheer him up. He needn't be dull if he uses his eyes; it's a cheerful corner.' And by this time, Ferdy, I had remembered all about you being hurt, and it came into my mind how nice it would be if the swallows would tell us stories of all the things they see at the other side of the world when they go away for the winter."

"I don't think it's quite the other side of the world," said Ferdy doubtfully, "not as far as that."

"Well, never mind," said Chrissie, with a little impatience, "you know what I mean. If you keep interrupting me so, I can't tell it rightly."

"I won't, then," said Ferdy.

"There isn't much more to tell," continued Chrissie. "I looked up, thinking I might see the swallows or martins, whichever they are, and I called out, 'Oh, won't you come down and speak to me? It would be so nice for you to tell Ferdy stories about your adventures, now that I can understand what you say.' And I felt *so* pleased. But I

couldn't see them, and all I heard was twittering again, — twittering and chirping, — and then somehow I awoke, and there really *was* twittering and chirping to be heard, for my window was a little open. It was a funny dream, Ferdy, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very," said Ferdy. "I wish you'd go on with it to-night and make them tell you stories."

Chrissie shook her head.

"I don't think any one could dream regular stories like that," she said. "But it is rather nice to fancy that the swallows know about us, and that it's the same ones who come back every year. It makes them seem like friends."

"Yes," said Ferdy, "it is nice. I wonder," he went on, "what sort of things they meant me to look at out of the window. It did rather sound, Chrissie, as if they thought I'd have to stay a long time here in bed, didn't it?"

Chrissie laughed, though a little nervously.

"How funny you are, Ferdy," she said. "How could the *swallows* know, even if it had been real and not a dream? Still, we may a little fancy it is true. We could almost make a story of the window — of all the things to be seen, and all the people passing.

When you are able to be on the sofa, Ferdy, it might stand so that you would see all ways — it would really be like a watch tower."

Ferdy raised himself a *very* little on one elbow.

"Yes," he said eagerly, "I see how you mean. I do hope I may soon be on the sofa. I think I would make a plan of looking out of one side part of the day, and then out of the other side. I don't think it would be so bad to be ill if you could make plans. It's the lying all day just the same that must get so dreadfully dull."

"Well, you need never do that," said his sister, "not even now. When Miss Lilly comes I'm to do a little lessons first, and then I daresay she'll come in here and read aloud to us, and when I go a walk mamma will sit with you. Things will soon get into plans."

"If I could do some of my work," said Ferdy, "cutting out or painting things for my scrap-book."

"I daresay you soon can," said Chrissie hopefully. She was pleased that he had not questioned her more closely as to what the doctors had said, for fortunately her cheerful talking had made him partly for-

get that he had made up his mind the night before to find out exactly everything she could tell him.

Suddenly Chrissie, who was standing in the window, gave a little cry.

"There is Miss Lilly," she exclaimed. "I am so glad. Now she has stopped to talk to somebody. Who can it be? Oh, I see, it's that naughty Jesse Piggot! I wonder why he isn't at school? She seems talking to him quite nicely. Now she's coming on again and Jesse is touching his cap. He *can* be very polite when he likes. Shall I run and meet Miss Lilly, and bring her straight up here? No, I can't, for there's mamma going down the drive towards her. She must have seen her coming from the drawing-room window."

"Go on," said Ferdy. "Tell me what they are doing. Are they shaking hands and talking to each other? I daresay they're talking about *me*. Does Miss Lilly look sorry? P'r'aps mamma is explaining that I can't have any lessons to-day."

"N—no," said Chrissie, "she's talking quite — like always, but — she's holding mamma's hand."

"Oh," said Ferdy with satisfaction, "that does mean she's sorry, I'm sure. It would be nice, Chris-

sie, if I was lying more in the window. I could see all those int'resting things myself. I could see a good deal now if I was sitting up more," and for a moment he startled his sister by moving as if he were going to try to raise himself in bed.

"Oh, Ferdy, you mustn't," she cried, darting towards him.

But poor Ferdy was already quite flat on his pillow again.

"I *can't*," he said with a sigh, "I can't sit up the least little bit," and tears came into his eyes.

"Well, don't look so unhappy," said Chrissie, returning to her post at the window, "for they are coming in now, and mamma won't be pleased if she thinks I've let you get dull. There now, I hear them coming upstairs."

"All right," said Ferdy manfully, "I'm not going to look unhappy."

And it was quite a cheerful little face which met his mother's anxious glance as she opened the door to usher in Miss Lilly.

CHAPTER V

JESSE PIGGOT

Miss Lilly's face was cheerful too. At least so it seemed to Ferdy, for she was smiling, and immediately began speaking in a bright, quick way.

But Chrissie looked at her once or twice and "understood." She saw faint traces of tears having been very lately in her governess's kind eyes, and she heard a little tremble in the voice below the cheeriness. "My dear Ferdy," Miss Lilly was saying, "see what comes of holidays! Much better have lessons than accidents, but it's an ill wind that blows no good. We shall have famous time now for your *favourite* lessons — sums and — "

"Now, Miss Lilly, you're joking — you know you are," said Ferdy, looking up in her face with his sweet blue eyes — eyes that to the young girl's fancy looked very wistful that morning. He had stretched out his arms, and was clasping them round her neck. Ferdy was very fond of Miss

Lilly. "*Aren't* you joking?" He wasn't quite, quite sure if she was, for sums were one of the few crooks in Ferdy's lot, and rather a sore subject.

Something in the tone of his voice made Miss Lilly kiss him again as she replied, "Of course I'm joking, my dear little matter-of-fact. No, your mamma says you are only to do your *really* favourite lessons for a week or two, and not those if they tire you. We are all going to spoil you, I'm afraid, my boy."

"I don't want to be spoilt," said Ferdy. "Chrissie and I have been talking. I want to make plans and be — be useful or some good to somebody, even if I have to stay in bed a good bit. What I most want to get out of bed for is to lie on the sofa and have the end of it pulled into the window, so that I can see along the roads all ways. Oh, Chrissie, you must tell Miss Lilly about the swallows, and — and — what was it I wanted to ask you?" He looked round, as if he were rather puzzled.

"Are you not talking too much?" said Miss Lilly, for the little fellow's eyes were very bright — too bright, she feared. "Chrissie dear, perhaps

you can remember what Ferdy wanted to ask me about."

"Oh, I know," said Ferdy; "it was about Jesse Piggot. Chrissie, you ask."

"We saw you talking to him — at least I did — out of the window, and we wondered what it was about. They all say he's a very naughty boy, Miss Lilly."

"I know," Miss Lilly replied. "He's a Draymoor boy" — Draymoor was the name of the mining village that Ferdy had been thinking about on his birthday morning — "or rather he used to be, till his uncle there died."

"And now he lives at Farmer Meare's, where he works, but he's still naughty," said Chrissie, as if it was rather surprising that the having left off living at the black village had not made Jesse good at once.

Miss Lilly smiled.

"I don't think everybody at Draymoor is naughty," she said. "I think Jesse would have been a difficult boy to manage anywhere, though Draymoor isn't a place with much in the way of good example certainly. But I hope it's getting a

little better. If one could get hold of the children." She sat silent for a moment or two, her eyes looking as if they saw scenes not there. "I know several of the miners' families who live nearer us than Draymoor—at Bollins, and there are some such nice children among them."

Bollins was a small hamlet on the Draymoor road, and the little house where Miss Lilly lived with her grandfather, an elderly man who had once been a doctor, was just at the Evercombe side of Bollins.

"But you haven't told us what you were saying to Jesse," said Chrissie.

"Oh no," said Miss Lilly. "Poor boy, it was nice of him. He was asking how Master Ferdy was."

Ferdy looked pleased.

"Did you tell him I was better?" he asked.

"I said I hoped so, but that I had not seen you yet. And then he asked if he might send you his 'respexs' and 'Was there any birds' eggs you'd a fancy for?'"

"Poor Jesse," said Ferdy. "But birds' eggs are one of the things he's been so naughty about—

taking them all and selling them to somebody at Freston. Papa's almost sure — at least Ferguson is — that he took some thrushes' eggs out of our garden. Fancy, Miss Lilly!"

"And then for him to offer to get Ferdy any," said Chrissie.

"He knows I c'lect them," said Ferdy; "but papa told me long ago, when I was quite little, never to take all the eggs, and *I've* never taken more than one. If you see Jesse again will you tell him he must never take more than one, Miss Lilly?"

"I think in this case," she replied, "it is better to tell him not to take any at all — the temptation would be too great if he knows he can always sell them. I told him I would give you his message, but that I did not think you wanted any eggs that he could get you, and I advised him to leave bird's-nesting alone, as it had already got him into trouble."

"What did he say?" asked Christine.

"He looked rather foolish and said he 'had nought to do of an evening, that was what got him into mischief; it wasn't as if he had a home

of his own,' though as far as that goes, I see plenty of boys who *have* homes of their own idling about in the evenings. It doesn't matter in the summer, but in the winter grandfather and I often feel sorry for them, and wish we could do something to amuse them. But now, Chrissie dear, we had better go to the schoolroom; your mamma is coming to sit with Ferdy for an hour or so."

"Good-bye, darling," said Chrissie, as she stooped to kiss Ferdy's pale little face — it had grown very pale again since the excitement of seeing Miss Lilly had faded away. "We shall be back soon — won't we, Miss Lilly?" she went on, turning to her governess as they left the room together.

"It depends on how he is," was the reply. "Mrs. Ross hopes that he will have a little sleep now, but if he is awake and not too tired when you have finished your lessons, I will read aloud to you both in his room."

"Miss Lilly," began Chrissie again, looking up very sadly when they were seated at the schoolroom table, "I don't want to be silly, but I really don't feel as if I could do any lessons. It is so — so dreadful to be without Ferdy, when you

think that only the day before yesterday we were both here together and so happy, looking forward to his birthday," and the child put her head down on her arms and broke into deep though quiet sobs.

In an instant Miss Lilly had left her place and was kneeling on the floor beside her.

"My poor little Chrissie, my dear little Chrissie," she said, "I am so sorry for you," and the tone of her voice showed that it was difficult for her to keep back her own tears, — "so very sorry; but remember, dear, that we can do much better for Ferdy by controlling our grief than by giving way to it. A great deal depends on keeping him cheerful and happily employed and interested. When I got your mother's note yesterday afternoon — oh dear, what a shock it was to me! — I spoke to my grandfather about Ferdy a great deal, and he said in such cases much depends on not letting the nervous system give way. Do you understand at all what I mean?"

"Yes, I think so," said Chrissie, drying her eyes and listening eagerly. "You mean if poor Ferdy was to lie there all day alone, like some poor

children have to do, I daresay, he'd get to feel as if he would never get well again."

"Just so," said Miss Lilly, pleased to see how sensible Chrissie was. "Of course, he must not be tired or allowed to excite himself, and for a few days he is sure to be restless and fidgety from weakness; but as he gradually gets stronger again in himself, we must do all we can not only to amuse him, but to keep up his interest in things and people outside himself."

"I know," said Chrissie, "if he can feel he's of any good to anybody, that would make him happier than anything. Ferdy has never been selfish, has he, Miss Lilly?"

"No, he certainly has never seemed so, and I do not think suffering and trial such as he may have to bear will make him so."

Chrissie's face fell again at the two sad words.

Miss Lilly saw it, and went on speaking quietly. "I don't mean anything very dreadful, dear, but he may have to stay in bed or on a couch for a long time, and of course that cannot but be a great trial to an active boy. Let us get on with

your lessons now, Chrissie, in case Ferdy is awake when they are over."

He was not awake. He slept a good part of the morning, which Mrs. Ross, sitting beside him, was very glad of; and when at last he opened his eyes and looked about him, it was not long before a smile came to his face, and he cheered his mother by saying he felt "so nicely rested."

"May Chris and Miss Lilly come back now?" he asked. "Miss Lilly said she would read aloud."

Yes, Chris and Miss Lilly would be only too happy to come, but first Ferdy must be "good" and drink some beef-tea, which was standing all ready.

It was rather an effort to do so. Ferdy did not like beef-tea, and he was not at all hungry, and he just wanted to lie still and not be bothered. But "To please me" from his mother was enough, and when she kissed him and said he *was* "a good boy," he told her, laughing, that he felt as if he were a little baby again.

Chrissie's face brightened when she heard the sound of her brother's laugh.

"Are you feeling better, Ferdy dear?" she said. "I *am* so glad, and Miss Lilly has brought a story-book of her own that we have never read."

"Oh, how nice!" said Ferdy. "Do tell me the name of the book, Miss Lilly."

"It is short stories," she replied. "I will read you the names of some of them, and you shall choose which you would like best."

The titles were all very tempting, but Ferdy made a good hit, and fixed upon one of the most interesting in the book, so said Miss Lilly. It was about a family of children in Iceland, and though it was rather long, they wished there was more of it when it came to an end. Then Miss Lilly looked at her watch.

"There is still a quarter of an hour," she said, as she turned over the leaves. "Yes, here is a short story, which will just about fill up the time."

Ferdy and Chrissie looked very pleased, but they did not say anything. They were so afraid of losing any of the precious fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER VI

A FAIRY TALE — AND THOUGHTS

"THE name of the story," said Miss Lilly, "is 'A Fairy House,'" and then she went on to read it.

"Once upon a time there was a fairy who had done something wrong, and for this reason had to be punished. I do not know exactly what it was that she had done, perhaps only something that we should scarcely think wrong at all, such as jumping on a mushroom before it was full grown, or drinking too much dew out of a lily-cup, and thereby leaving the poor flower thirsty through the hot noontide. Most likely it was nothing worse than something of this kind, but still it was a fault that had to be corrected; so the little culprit was banished to a desert part of fairyland, a bleak and barren spot, which you would scarcely have thought could be found in the magic country which we always think of as so bright and beautiful.

"There she stayed with nothing to do for some

time, which is about the worst punishment a fairy can have to endure. So she felt very pleased when one morning there came a messenger direct from the queen, charged to tell the little exile that she should be forgiven and released from her banishment as soon as she should have fulfilled a task which was to be set her. This task was to build a house, which to us may sound almost impossible without masons and carpenters and all manner of workmen. But fairy houses are not like ours, as you will hear.

"The messenger led the fairy to a spot on the moor where there was a heap of stones.

"'These are what you are to build with,' he said. 'As soon as the house is completed you may send a butterfly to tell the queen, and she will then come to test it. If it is quite perfect, you shall return at once with her to the court,' and so saying he fled away.

"The fairy set to work in good spirits. She had no need of mortar, or scaffolding, or tools, or anything, indeed, but her own little hands and the stones. Nor were the stones cut evenly and regularly, as you might have expected. They were of

all sizes and shapes, but each only required a touch from the fairy's fingers at once to fit itself into the place which she saw it was intended for. So for some time the work went on merrily. It was not till the house was very nearly completed that the fairy began to fear something was wrong. It lopped a little — a *very* little — to one side. But there was nothing to be done that she could see. So she finished it in hopes that the queen would not notice the tiny imperfection, and despatched the butterfly to announce her readiness for her royal lady's visit.

"The queen arrived promptly, — fairy queens are never unpunctual, — and at first sight she smiled amiably.

"'You have worked hard,' she said to the poor fairy, who stood there half hopeful and half trembling. Then her Majesty stepped out of her chariot, patting her winged steeds as she passed them, and entered the new building, followed by the little architect.

"All seemed right till they got to the second floor, when the queen stopped and looked round her sharply.

"'Something is wrong here,' she said. 'The left-hand wall is out of level. I suspected it downstairs, but waited to see.'

"The fairy builder looked very distressed.

"'Did you know there was anything wrong?' said the queen, more coldly than she had yet spoken.

"'I—I was afraid it was a little crooked,' the little fairy replied, 'but I hoped perhaps your Majesty would not mind it.'

"'My messenger told you that the building must be *perfect*,' replied the queen. 'You had all the stones, every one ready for its place. If you have left one out, even the smallest, the building cannot be perfect. Ah, well, you must try again,' and so saying she left the house, followed by the builder. As soon as she stepped outside she waved her wand, and in an instant the walls had fallen apart, and there was nothing to be seen but the heap of stones as before.

"The poor little fairy sat down and cried as she saw the queen's chariot disappear in the air.

"'I don't know what to do,' she thought. 'It would be just the same thing if I set to work to

build it up again. I am sure I used every stone, down to some quite tiny ones; but still it is no good crying about it,' and she started up, determined to try afresh.

"As she did so, a very slight sound caught her ears. Out of her pocket had rolled a very small stone, a tiny, insignificant pebble, probably smaller than any she had used in the building.

"'That's the very pebble I found in my shoe the other day,' she exclaimed. 'I must have picked it up with my handkerchief,' and she was just about to fling it away when a new idea struck her. Was it possible that this little atom of a stone — or rather its absence — was what had spoilt the whole piece of work? It might be so, for had not the queen said that the slightest little scrap of material wanting would spoil the perfection of the building.

"And, full of fresh hope, she carefully placed the little stone on the top of the heap and began again. All went well. Deep down in the foundations, unseen but far from unneeded, the tiny pebble found its own place, and before the sun set, the magic edifice stood perfect, gleaming

white and fair in the radiance of the evening sky.

"It was without fear or misgiving this time that the fairy sent off her butterfly messenger the next morning; and her joy was complete when the queen not only took her back to court in her own chariot, but as a proof of her perfect restoration to favour, transported the pretty white house by a wave of her wand to the centre of a lovely garden near her own palace, and gave it to the fairy as her home."

Miss Lilly stopped reading. The children looked up, pleased but a little puzzled.

"What a funny story," said Ferdy; "it's nice, but isn't it more what you call a — I forget the word."

"Allegory, do you mean?" said Miss Lilly. "Well yes, perhaps. Many fairy stories have a kind of meaning behind them, but I don't think this one is difficult to guess."

"It means, I suppose," said Chrissie, "that everything is of use, if you can find the right place for it."

"A little more than that," said Miss Lilly. "We

TOOK HER BACK TO COURT IN HER OWN CHARIOT.—P. 84.

might put it this way — that *everybody*, even the smallest and weakest, has his or her own place in the house of — " and she hesitated.

"In the house of the world?" said Ferdy.

"In the house of life," said Miss Lilly after thinking a little. "That says it better."

Then, seeing that Ferdy was looking rather tired, she told Chrissie to run off and get dressed for going a walk.

"I will send Flowers to sit with you," she said, as she stooped to kiss the little invalid, "and in the afternoon Chrissie and I will come back again for an hour or so if you are not asleep."

"I won't be asleep," said Ferdy; "I have slept quite enough to last me all day. Miss Lilly — "

"What, dear?" for the boy's eyes looked as if he wanted to ask her something. "Would you like us to bring you in some flowers? — not garden ones, but wild ones. There are still primroses — and violets, of course — in the woods."

"Yes," Ferdy replied, "I should like them *very* much. And could you get some moss, Miss Lilly? I would like to arrange them with moss, in that sort of birds'-nesty-looking way."

"I know how you mean," the young lady said. "Yes, we will bring you some moss. And, by the bye, Ferdy, if I had some wire I could show you how to make moss baskets that last for ever so long to put flowers in. You put a little tin or cup to hold water in the middle of the basket —the moss quite hides it,—and then you can always freshen up the moss by sousing it in water."

"What a nice word 'sousing' is," said Ferdy, in his quaint old-fashioned way. "It makes you think of bathing in the sea. Miss Lilly, do you think I'll ever be able to bathe in the sea again? I do so love it. And then there's skating and cricket, and when I go to school there'll be football. Papa was so good at football when he was at school. I wonder—" he stopped short. "I wonder," he went on again, "if I'll ever be able for any of those things. Boys who are all right, *well* boys, don't think of the difference being like me makes."

"No, they don't," his governess agreed. "But there is still a good long while before you would be going to school, Ferdy dear."

"I know," he said, though he could not keep back a little sigh. "I've only been two days in bed, but I have thought such a lot. Miss Lilly, there was something I wanted to ask you. It's about that boy, Jesse Piggot. I was thinking about him when I was awake in the night. If you meet him, please thank him for asking if I was better, and do you think mamma would let him come in one day to see me? It's partly that story, too."

Miss Lilly did not at first understand.

"The 'nallegory," said Ferdy, "about all the stones being some good."

Miss Lilly's face cleared; she looked pleased and interested.

"Oh yes," she said.

"I haven't got it straight in my head yet," said Ferdy. "I want to think a lot more. It's partly about me myself, and partly about Jesse and boys like him. Oh, I do wish I could be on the sofa in the window," he added suddenly. "I'd like to see the children going to school and coming back."

"I hope you will be on the sofa in a very few

days, dear," said Miss Lilly. "But I must go—Chrissie will be waiting for me. I hope we shall get some nice flowers and moss, and to-morrow I will bring some wire and green thread that I have at home on purpose for such things."

When she had gone Flowers made her appearance. She sat down with her work, and Ferdy lay so still, that she thought he must have fallen asleep again. But no, Ferdy was not asleep, only thinking; and to judge by the look on his face, his thoughts were interesting.

The moss baskets proved a great success as well as a great amusement. Ferdy's nimble fingers seemed to have grown even more nimble and delicate in touch now that he was forced to lie still. They twisted the wire into all sorts of new shapes, some quaint, some graceful, that Miss Lilly had never even thought of, and when some little old cups without handles or tiny jelly pots or tins were found to fit in, so that the flowers could have plenty of water to keep them fresh, you cannot think how pretty the moss baskets looked. The children's mother was quite delighted with one that was presented to her, and

she smiled more cheerfully than she had yet done since Ferdy's accident, to see him so busy and happy.

And time went on. It is very curious how quickly we get accustomed to things — even to great overwhelming changes, which seem at first as if they must utterly upset and make an end of everything. It is a great blessing that we *do* get used to what *is*. When I was a little girl I remember reading a story about the old proverb which in those days was to be found as one of the model lines in a copy-book. This one stood for the letter "C," and it was, "Custom commonly makes things easy."

Somehow the words fixed themselves in my memory. You don't know how often and in what very far differing circumstances I have said them over to myself; sometimes in hopefulness, sometimes when I had to face sorrows that made me feel as if I *could* not face them, "Custom commonly" seemed to be whispered into my ear, as if by a gentle little fairy voice. And I found it came true, thank God! It is one of the ways in which He helps us to bear our sorrows and

master our difficulties, above all, *real* sorrows and *real* difficulties. Fanciful ones, or foolish ones that we make for ourselves, are often in the end the hardest to bear and to overcome.

It was so with little Ferdy and his friends. One month after that sad birthday that had begun so brightly, no stranger suddenly visiting the Watch House would have guessed from the faces and voices of its inmates how lately and how terribly the blow had fallen upon them. All seemed bright and cheerful, and even the boy's own countenance, though pale and thin, had a happy and peaceful expression. More than that indeed. He was often so merry that you could hear his laugh ringing through the house if you were only passing up or down stairs, or standing in the hall below.

By this time things had settled themselves down into a regular plan. The oriel room was now Ferdy's "drawing-room" — or drawing-room and dining-room in one, as he said himself. It was his day room, and every night and morning his father or Thomas, the footman, carried him most carefully and gently from and to the invalid

couch in his favourite window to bed, or *from* bed in his own little room.

This was a delightful change. Ferdy declared he felt "almost quite well again" when the day came on which he was allowed "to go to bed properly," and be attired nicely the next morning in a little dressing-gown made to look as like a sailor suit as possible.

His general health was good, thanks to the excellent care that was taken of him, and thanks too to his own cheerful character. There were times, of course, when he *did* find it difficult to be bright — lovely summer afternoons when a sharp pang pierced his little heart at the sight of the school children racing home in their careless healthfulness, or fresh sweet mornings when he longed with a sort of thirstiness to be able to go for a walk in the woods with Christine and Miss Lilly. But these sad feelings did not last long, though the days went on, and still the doctor shook his head at the idea even of his being carried down to the lawn and laid there, as Ferdy had begun to hope might be allowed.

The oriel window was his greatest comfort. It

really was a delightful window. On one side or other there was sure to be *something* to look at, and Ferdy was quick to find interest in everything. He loved to see the school children, some of whom were already known to him, some whom he learnt to know by sight from watching them pass.

But one boyish figure he missed. All this time Jesse Piggot had never been seen. Miss Lilly had looked out for him, as Ferdy had asked her to do, but in vain. And it was not till within a day or two of a month since the accident that she heard from some of the Draymoor people that the boy had been taken off "on a job" by one of his rough cousins at the colliery village.

"And no good will it do him neither," added the woman. "That's a lad as needs putting up to no manner o' mischief, as my master says."

"Wasn't it a pity to take him away from Farmer Meare's?" Miss Lilly added.

"They hadn't really room for him there," said the woman. "But Farmer Meare is a good man. He says he'll take the poor lad back again after a bit when there'll be more work that he can do."

Miss Lilly told this over to the children the next day. Ferdy looked up with interest in his eyes.

"I hope he will come back again soon," he said. "You know, Miss Lilly, I never finished talking about him to you. I was thinking of him again a lot yesterday; it was the birds, they *were* chattering so when I was alone in the afternoon. I was half asleep, I think, and hearing them reminded me in a dreamy way of birds' nests and eggs, and then, through that, of Jesse Piggot and what the fairy story put in my head about him."

"What was it?" asked Miss Lilly.

"It's rather difficult to explain," Ferdy replied. "I was thinking, you see, that if I never get well and strong again I wouldn't seem any use to anybody. It *does* seem as if some people were no use. And Jesse Piggot seems always in everybody's way, as if there was no place for him, though quite different from me, of course, for everybody's so kind to me. And then I thought of the stones, and how they all fitted in, and I wondered what I could get to do, and I thought perhaps I might help Jesse some way."

Miss Lilly looked at Ferdy. There was a very kind light in her eyes.

"Yes, Ferdy dear," she said. "I think I understand. When Jesse comes back we must talk more about it, and perhaps we shall find out some way of fitting him into his place. Stop dear, I think I had better look at your knitting; you are getting it a little too tight on the needles."

Ferdy handed it to her with a little sigh. He did not care very much for knitting, and he had also a feeling that it was girls' work. But it had been very difficult to find any occupation for him, as he could not go on making moss baskets always, and knitting seemed the best thing for the moment. He was now making a sofa blanket for his mother, in stripes of different colours, and Miss Lilly and Christine were helping him with it, as it would otherwise have been too long a piece of work.

"I'm rather tired of knitting," he said, "now that I know how to do it. I liked it better at first, but there's no planning about it now."

"We must think of a change of work for you before long," said Miss Lilly, as she quickly fin-

ished a row so as to get the stitches rather looser again. "Don't do any more this morning, Ferdy. Lie still and talk. Tell me about the birds chattering."

"They are so sweet and funny," said Ferdy. "Sometimes I fancy I'm getting to know their different voices. And there's one that stands just at the corner of the window-sill outside, that I really think I could draw. I know the look of him so well. Or I'll tell you what," he went on. "I could *figure* him, I'm sure I could, better than draw him."

"*Figure* him! what do you mean?" said Chrissie. "What funny words you say, Ferdy."

"Do you mean modelling it?" asked Miss Lilly. "Have you ever seen any modelling?"

"No," said Ferdy, "I don't understand."

"I mean using some soft stuff, like clay or wax, and shaping it, partly with your fingers and partly with tools," replied Miss Lilly. "I don't know much about it, but I remember one of my brothers doing something of the kind."

Ferdy reflected.

"It does sound rather fun," he said, "but I

didn't mean that. I meant cutting — with a nice sharp knife and soft wood. I am sure I could figure things that way. I know what made me think of it. It was a story about the village boys in Switzerland, who cut out things in the winter evenings."

"You mean carving," said Christine; "you shouldn't call it cutting. Yes, I've always thought it must be lovely work, but you would need to be awfully clever to do it."

"I'd like to try," said the boy. "When my sofa's put up a little higher at the back, the way Mr. Stern lets it be now, I can use my hands quite well. You needn't be afraid I'd cut myself. Oh, it *would* be jolly to cut out birds, and stags' heads, and things like that!"

"Stags' heads would be awfully difficult," said Christine, "because of the sticking-out horns — they're just like branches with lots of twigs on them. What is it you call them, Miss Lilly?"

"Antlers, isn't that what you mean?" Miss Lilly replied. "Yes, they would be very difficult. You would have to begin with something much simpler, Ferdy."

"I suppose I thought of stags because the Swiss boys in the story cut out stags' heads," said Ferdy. "I think I'd try a swallow's head. When I shut my eyes I can see one quite plain. Miss Lilly, don't you think I might try to *draw* one? If I had a piece of paper and a nice pencil —"

Just then the door opened and his mother came in. Her face brightened up as soon as she caught sight of Ferdy's cheerful expression and heard his eager tone — it was always so now. Since the accident Mrs. Ross seemed a kind of mirror of her boy; if he was happy and comfortable her anxious face grew smooth and peaceful; if he had had a bad night, or was tired, or in pain, she looked ten years older.

And Miss Lilly, who, though still quite young herself, was very thoughtful and sensible, saw this with anxiety.

"It will never do for things to go on like this," she said to herself, "the strain will break down poor Mrs. Ross. And if Ferdy is never to be quite well again, or even if it takes a long time for him to recover, it will get worse and worse. We must try to find something for him to do that will take

him out of himself, as people say, — something that will make him feel himself of use, poor dear, as he would like to be. I wonder if my grandfather could speak to Mrs. Ross and make her see that she should try not to be always so terribly anxious."

For old Dr. Lilly was a very wise man. In his long life he had acquired a great deal of knowledge besides "book-learning"; he had learnt to read human beings too.

But just now Miss Lilly's thoughtful face brightened up also as Ferdy's mother came in.

"We are talking about wood-carving," she said. "I am going to ask my grandfather about it. And Ferdy would like to prepare for it by drawing a little again — he was getting on nicely just before he was ill."

"I'd like a slate," said Ferdy, "because I could rub out so easily; only drawings on a slate never look pretty — white on black isn't right."

"*I* know what," exclaimed Christine. "Mamma, do let us get Ferdy one of those beautiful white china slates — a big one, the same as your little one that lies on the hall table for messages."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"That would do lovelily," he said.

So it was arranged that Christine should drive with her mother that afternoon to the nearest town — not Whittingham, but a smaller town in another direction, called Freston, in quest of a good-sized white china slate.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED PIG'S HEAD

Miss Lilly and Ferdy spent a quiet hour or two together after Christine and her mother had set off. Then, as it was really a half-holiday, and Miss Lilly usually went home immediately after luncheon on half-holidays, she said good-bye to Ferdy, after seeing him comfortably settled and Flowers within hail, and started on her own way home.

She was anxious to have a talk with her grandfather and ask his advice as to the best way of helping the little boy and his mother, and keeping off the dangers to both which she saw in the future.

It was a lovely day — quite a summer day now — for it was some way on in June, and this year the weather had been remarkably beautiful — never before quite so beautiful since she had come to live in the neighbourhood, thought the young girl

to herself, and she sighed a little as she pictured in her own mind what happy days she and her two little pupils might have had in the woods and fields round about Evercombe.

"Poor Ferdy," she thought, "I wonder if he really ever will get well again. That is, in a way, the hardest part of it all — the not knowing. It makes it so difficult to judge how to treat him in so many little ways."

She was not very far from her own home by this time, and looking up along the sunny road, she saw coming towards her a familiar figure.

"I do believe it is Jesse Piggot," she said to herself. "How curious, just when I'd been thinking about him the last day or two!"

Jesse stopped as he came up to her, and it seemed to Miss Lilly that his face grew a little red, though bashfulness was certainly not one of Jesse's weak points.

"Why, Jesse!" she exclaimed, "so you've got back again. How did you get on while you were away?"

Jesse's answer to this question was rather indistinct. He murmured something that sounded like

"All right, thank you, miss," but added almost immediately in a brighter tone, "How is Master Ferdy, please?"

"Pretty well," Miss Lilly replied; "that is to say, he doesn't suffer now, and we do all we can to cheer him up."

Jesse's face grew concerned and half puzzled.

"Ain't he all right again by this time?" he asked. "I thought he'd have been running about same as before, and a-riding on his new pony."

Miss Lilly shook her head rather sadly.

"Oh no," she said, "there's no chance of anything like that for a long time" — "if ever," she added to herself. "The kind of accident that happened to Master Ferdy," she went on, "is almost the worst of any to cure — worse than a broken leg, or a broken head even."

Jesse said nothing for a moment or two, but something in his manner showed the young lady that his silence did not come from indifference. He had something in his hand, a stick of some kind, and as Miss Lilly's eyes fell on it, she saw that he had been whittling it with a rough pocket-knife.

"I'VE DONE 'EM BEFORE FROM ONE OF THE OLD SQUEAKERS UP AT THE FARM."—P. 103.

"What is that, Jesse?" she said. "Are you making something?"

The boy's face grew distinctly redder now.

"'Tis nothing, miss," he said, looking very ashamed, "only a bit o' nonsense as I thought'd make Master Ferdy laugh. I've done 'em before from one of the old squeakers up at the farm."

And he half-reluctantly allowed Miss Lilly to take out of his hand a small stick, the top of which he had chipped into a rough, but unmistakable likeness to a pig's head.

Miss Lilly almost started. It seemed such a curious coincidence that just as she was going to consult her grandfather about some new interest and occupation for Ferdy, and just, too, as the idea of her little pupil's being of use to this poor waif and stray of a boy had been put into her mind by Ferdy himself, Jesse should turn up again, and in the new character of a possible art! For though not an artist of any kind herself, she had quick perceptions and a good eye, and in the queer, grotesque carving that the boy held in his hand she felt almost sure that she de-

tected signs of something — well, of *talent*, however uncultivated, to say the least.

Jesse did not understand her start of surprise and the moment's silence that followed it. He thought she was shocked, and he grew still redder as he hastily tried to hide the poor piggy in his hand.

"I didn't think as any one 'ud see it till I met Master Ferdy hisself some time; he's partial to pigs, is Master Ferdy, though no one can say as they're pretty. But I thought it'd make him laugh."

"My dear boy," exclaimed the young girl eagerly, "don't hide away the stick. You don't understand. I am very pleased with your pig — very pleased indeed. Have you done other things like it? I should like to — " but then she stopped for a moment. She must not say anything to put it into Jesse's scatter-brained head that he was a genius, and might make his fortune by wood-carving. Of all things, as she knew by what she had heard of him, it was important that he should learn to stick to his work and work hard. So she went on quietly, "I am sure Master Ferdy will like the

pig very much, and he will think it very kind of you to have thought of pleasing him. Let me look at it again," and she took it out of Jesse's rather unwilling hands.

"It is not quite finished yet, I see," she said, "but I think it is going to be a very nice, comical pig."

And, indeed, the grotesque expression of the ears and snout — of the whole, indeed — was excellent. You could scarcely help smiling when you looked at it.

Jesse's red face grew brighter.

"Oh no, miss," he said, "it bain't finished. I'm going to black the eyes a bit — just a touch, you know, with a pencil. And there's a lot more to do to the jowl. I'm going to have a good look at old Jerry — that's the oldest porker at the farm — when he's havin' his supper to-night; you can see his side face beautiful then," and Jesse's eyes twinkled with fun.

"Oh, then you are back at the farm — at Mr. Meare's?" said Miss Lilly. "I am glad of that."

"I'm not to say reg'lar there," said Jesse, "only half on — for odd jobs so to say. I've been a mes-

sage to the smithy at Bollins just now," and certainly, to judge by the leisurely way in which he had been sauntering along when Ferdy's governess first caught sight of him, his "odd jobs" did not seem to be of a very pressing description.

"That's a pity," said the lady.

"Farmer says as he'll take me on reg'lar after a bit," added Jesse.

"And where are you living, then?" inquired Miss Lilly.

"They let me sleep in the barn," said Jesse. "And Sundays I goes to my folk at Draymoor, though I'd just as lief stop away. Cousin Tom and I don't hit it off, and it's worser when he's sober. Lord, miss, he did hide me when he was away on that navvy job!" and Jesse gave a queer sort of grin.

Miss Lilly shuddered.

"And what do you do in the evenings?" she asked.

Jesse looked uncomfortable.

"Loaf about a bit," he said vaguely.

"That isn't a very good way of spending time," she said.

Jesse screwed up his lips as if he were going to whistle, but a sudden remembrance of the respect due to the young lady stopped him.

"What's I to do else, miss?" he said.

"Well, you've something to do to-night, any way," she replied. "If you can finish the pig's head, I am sure Master Ferdy will be delighted to have it. I won't tell him about it," as she detected a slight look of disappointment on Jesse's face, "oh no, it must be a surprise. But if you call at the Watch House the first time you are passing after it is ready, I will see if I can get leave for you to see him yourself for a few minutes. The afternoon would be the best time, I think."

The boy's face beamed.

"Thank you, miss; thank you kindly," he said. "I'll see if I can't get it done to-night."

And then the two parted with a friendly farewell on each side.

Miss Lilly had a good deal to think of as she finished her walk home. She felt quite excited at the discovery she had made, and eager to tell her grandfather about it. And she was all the more pleased to see him standing at the gate

watching for her as she came within sight, for Dr. Lilly had something to tell her on his part, too.

"You are late, my dear," he said, "late, that is to say, for a Wednesday."

"Yes, gran," she replied, "I had to stay an hour or so with poor Ferdy, as Mrs. Ross and Christine were going out early."

"Then there is nothing wrong with him," said the old doctor. "I get quite nervous about the poor little chap myself. But that was not why I was coming to meet you, Eva; it was to tell you of an invitation I have from my old friend, Mr. Linham, to spend two or three weeks with him travelling in Cornwall. I should much like to go, I don't deny, except for leaving you alone, and I must decide at once, as he wants to know."

"*Of course* you must go, dear gran," replied the girl. "I don't mind being alone in the least. I daresay Mrs. Ross would be glad to have me more with them, especially if — oh grandfather, I have a lot to talk to you about!"

And then she told him all she had been thinking about Ferdy, and the curious coincidence of

meeting Jesse Piggot, and the discovery of his unsuspected talent for wood-carving.

Dr. Lilly listened with great interest. He was pleased with Eva's good sense in not praising the old porker's head too much, and he quite agreed with her that it would be well worth while to encourage little Ferdy's wish to try his own skill in the same direction.

"I believe I know the very man to give him a little help to start with," he said. "He is a young fellow who carves for Ball and Guild at Whittingham. I attended him once in a bad illness. Now he is getting on well, though he is not a genius. But he would be able to help with the technical part of the work — the right wood to use, the proper tools, and so on. If Mr. Ross approves, I will write to this man — Brock is his name — and ask him to come over to talk about it. The only difficulty is that I fear he is never free except in the evenings."

"I don't think that would matter," said Miss Lilly, — "not in summer time. Ferdy does not go to bed till half-past eight or nine. And if he gets on well with his carving, grandfather, — and

I do believe he will; you know I have always thought there was something uncommon about Ferdy, — *he* will be able to help Jesse. Who knows what may come of it? It may be the saving of Jesse."

Her pleasant face grew quite rosy with excitement. It might be such a good thing in so many ways — something to take the little invalid's thoughts off himself and to convince his too anxious mother that feeling himself able to be of use to others would be by far the surest way of securing Ferdy's own happiness in the uncertain and perhaps very trying life before him. And her grandfather quite sympathised in all she felt.

So that evening two letters were sent off from the pretty cottage at Bollins, one to Mr. Linham, accepting his invitation to Cornwall, and one to Mr. Ross, asking him to stop a moment on his drive past the old doctor's house the next morning to have a little talk about Ferdy.

"He is sure to do so, and sure too to be pleased with anything *you* think would be good for Ferdy," said Eva to her grandfather.

And this was quite true, for though Dr. Lilly no longer looked after ill people, his opinion was most highly thought of, and by no one more than by Mr. Ross, who had known him as long as he could remember knowing any one.

After Miss Lilly left him that afternoon, Ferdy, contrary to his custom, fell asleep and had a good long nap, only awaking when the carriage bringing his mother and Chrissie back from their expedition drove up to the door.

Mrs. Ross's anxious face grew brighter when she saw how fresh and well the boy was looking. She had been afraid lest the increasing heat of the weather would try Ferdy's strength too much, especially as the doctors would not yet allow him to be carried out of doors. But here again the oriel window proved of the greatest use: it could always be open at one side or the other, according to the time of day, so that it was easy to catch whatever breeze was going for Ferdy's benefit, and yet to shade him from the sun. He certainly did not look at all fagged or exhausted this afternoon, though it had been rather a hot day for June.

Christine followed her mother into the room, her

arms filled with parcels, her eyes bright with pleasure.

"We've got such a beautiful slate for you, Ferdy," she said, "and a book of animal pictures — outlines — that will be quite easy to copy on a slate, and the man at the shop said it was a very good thing to study them for any one who wanted to try wood-carving."

"Oh, how nice!" said Ferdy eagerly. "Do let me see, Chrissie! And what are those other parcels you've got?"

"Two are from the German confectioner's at Freston — cakes for tea — that nice kind, you know — the fancy curly shape, like the ones in the 'Struwelpeter' pictures."

Ferdy's face expressed great satisfaction.

"We must have a regular good tea," he said; "those cakes are meant to be eaten while they're quite fresh. And what's the other parcel, Chrissie?"

"Oh, it's two little ducky cushions," his sister replied, "quite little tiny ones of eider-down. They are to put under your elbows when you're sitting up, or at the back of your neck, or into any little odd

corner where the big ones don't fit in. You know you've often wished for a little cushion, and when you go out into the garden or for a drive you'll need them still more, mamma says."

All the time she had been talking, Christine had been undoing her parcels, Mrs. Ross helping her to lay out their contents.

"Thank you so very much, mamma," said Ferdy, "everything's beautiful. Which way did you drive to Freston?"

"We went one way and came back the other," said Mrs. Ross, — "by the road that passes near Draymoor, you know. Dear me, even on a fine summer's day that place looks grim and wretched! And there seems always to be idle boys about, even early in the afternoon."

"Miss Lilly says there's often a lot that can't get work to do," said Ferdy. "It's this way — sometimes they're very, *very* busy, and sometimes there's not enough to do, and that's how they get into mischief, I suppose," he added, with the air of a small Solomon.

"It seems a pity that no one can take a real interest in the place," said his mother; "but here

comes tea, Ferdy. I am sure we shall all be glad of it. Chrissie, you can arrange the cakes while I pour out tea."

They seemed a happy little party that afternoon — happier than Ferdy's mother, at least, would have believed it possible they could be, had she, three months or so before, foreseen the sad trouble that was to befall her darling.

"I wonder how soon I shall be able to go for a drive," said Ferdy. "Will you ask the big doctor the next time he comes, mamma? I should like to see Draymoor again. I've never forgotten that day I went there with papa. And now I understand about it so much better. Miss Lilly says it isn't that the people are very poor — they earn a lot of money when they are at work, but then they spend it all instead of spreading it over the times they haven't work. Isn't it a pity they can't be taught something else to do for the idle times, to keep them from quarrelling with each other and being unkind to their wives and children?"

Mrs. Ross looked at Ferdy with surprise and some misgiving. It was doubtless Miss Lilly who had talked to him about the Draymoor people.

Was it quite wise of her to do so? Ferdy was so sensitive already, and his illness seemed to have made him even more "old-fashioned." To hear him talk as he was doing just now, one could easily have believed him twice his real age. But a second glance at his face made her feel easy again. He was speaking in a tone of quiet interest, but not in any nervous or excited way.

"Yes," she replied, "there is plenty to be done to improve Draymoor, and at present no one seems to take any special charge of it. If your father was less busy and richer, I know he would like to try to do something for the people there."

"Miss Lilly says if there was any one to look after the boys it would be such a good thing," said Ferdy. "I hope Jesse Piggot won't go back there to live."

Then they went on to talk of other things. Ferdy greatly approved of the German cakes, and his mother's spirits rose higher as she saw him eating them with a good appetite and making little jokes with his sister.

The rest of the evening passed happily. Ferdy amused himself for some time by "trying" his new

slate. He drew two or three animals without any model, and was delighted to find that Chrissie recognised them all, and that they did not compare very badly with the outlines she had brought him.

"I am tired now," he said as he put down his pencil with a little sigh, but a sigh of contentment as much as of weariness, "but I know what I'll do to-morrow, Chrissie. I'll *study* one animal's head, or perhaps a bird. If those old swallows would but settle for a bit on the window-sill, or even on one of the branches close by, I'm sure I could do them. What a pity it is they can't understand what we want, for I always feel as if they knew all about us."

"That's because of my dream," said Christine importantly. "But I must go now, Ferdy dear; Flowers has called me two or three times to change my frock."

So Ferdy lay on his couch, one end of which was drawn into the window, watching the sweet summer sunset and the gentle "good-night" stealing over the world. There were not many passers-by at that hour. The school children had long

WATCHING THE SWEET SUMMER SUNSET. — P. 116.

ago gone home; the little toddlers among them must already be in bed and asleep. Now and then a late labourer came slowly along with lagging steps, or one of the village dogs, in search of a stray cat perhaps, pricked up his ears when Ferdy tapped on the window-pane. But gradually all grew very still, even the birds ceasing to twitter and cheep as they settled themselves for the night. And Ferdy himself felt ready to follow the general example, when suddenly his attention was caught by a figure that came down the lane from the farm and stood for a moment or two at the end of the drive where the gate had been left open.

Ferdy almost jumped as he saw it.

"Flowers," he exclaimed, as at that moment the maid came into the room followed by Thomas to carry him up to bed. "Flowers — Thomas, do look! Isn't that Jesse Piggot standing at the gate? He must have come back again."

"I don't know, I'm sure, Master Ferdy," said Flowers, who did not feel any particular interest in Jesse Piggot.

But Thomas was more good-natured. He peered out into the dusk.

"It looks like him, Master Ferdy," he said, "but I don't know that he'll get much of a welcome even if he *has* come back. Such a lad for mischief never was," for Thomas had had some experience of Jesse once or twice when the boy had been called into the Watch House for an odd job.

"Never mind about that," said Ferdy, "*I* shall be glad to see him again. Be sure you find out in the morning, Thomas, if it is him."

CHAPTER VIII

WELCOME VISITORS

BUT Ferdy did not need to wait till Thomas had made his inquiries, which most likely would have taken some time, as he was not a young man who cared to be hurried.

Miss Lilly in her quiet way was quite excited when she came the next morning.

"Whom do you think I met yesterday afternoon on my way home, Ferdy?" she said as soon as she and Chrissie came into the oriel room for the part of the morning they now regularly passed there with the little invalid.

"I can guess," said Ferdy eagerly. "I believe it was Jesse Piggot," and then he told Miss Lilly about having seen a boy's figure standing at the end of the drive looking in.

"Poor fellow," said Miss Lilly, "I daresay he was watching in the hopes of seeing some one who could—" but then she stopped short.

Ferdy looked up with curiosity.

"'Who could' what, Miss Lilly?" he asked.

His governess smiled.

"I think I mustn't tell you," she said. "It might disappoint the boy, if he is wanting to give you a little surprise. And I scarcely think he would have sent in a message by any one but me," she went on, speaking more to herself than to Ferdy, "after what I promised him last night."

"What did you promise him, Miss Lilly?" the little boy asked. His curiosity was greatly excited.

"Only that if possible I would get leave for him to come in and see you for a few minutes," the young lady replied. "I must ask Mrs. Ross."

"Oh, I'm sure mamma wouldn't mind," said Ferdy. "I do so wonder what the surprise is."

"You'd better not think about it," said Chrissie sagely. "That's what *I* do. I put things quite out of my mind if I know I can't find out about them. Don't you, Miss Lilly?"

Miss Lilly smiled.

"I try to," she said, "but I own I find it very far from easy sometimes. I think the best way to put something out of your mind is to put

something else in. So supposing we go on with our lessons, Ferdy."

"Oh, but first," said Ferdy eagerly, "first I must show you the beautiful things mamma and Chris brought me yesterday. See here, Miss Lilly."

And Eva examined his new possessions with great interest, even greater interest than Ferdy knew, for her head was full of her new ideas about Jesse, and the talent she believed he had shown in his carving. She turned over the leaves of the little book of animal outlines till she came to one of a pig, and she sat looking at it in silence for so long that Christine peeped over her shoulder to see what it could be that had so taken her fancy.

"It's a pig, Ferdy," she called out, laughing. "Miss Lilly, I didn't know you were so fond of pigs. I'm sure there are much prettier animals in the book than pigs."

"I daresay there are," said her governess good-naturedly. "But I *am* very interested in pigs, especially their heads. I wish you would draw me one, Ferdy, after lessons. I would like to see how you can do it."

Ferdy was quite pleased at the idea. But in the meantime Miss Lilly reminded both children that they must give their attention to the English history which was that morning's principal lesson.

Jesse Piggot did not make his appearance. It was a busy day at the farm, and for once there was plenty for him to do. He had finished carving the stick, and if he had dared he would have run off with it to the Watch House. But what he had gone through lately had been of use to the boy. He was becoming really anxious to get a good regular place at Farmer Meare's, for he had no wish to go off again on "odd jobs" under the tender mercies of his rough Draymoor cousins.

And, on the whole, Miss Lilly settled in her own mind that she was not sorry he had not come that day, for she hoped that Mr. Ross had seen her grandfather that morning and heard from him about the lessons in wood-carving which the old doctor thought might be so good for Ferdy; and more than that, she hoped that perhaps Mr. Ross's interest in poor Jesse might be increased by what Dr. Lilly would tell about him.

It all turned out very nicely, as you will hear.

Late that afternoon, just as lessons were over and Chrissie had got her mother's leave to walk a little bit of her way home with Miss Lilly, Thomas appeared in the oriel room with a message from Mrs. Ross.

"Would Miss Lilly stay to have tea with Miss Christine and Master Ferdy? Mrs. Ross would come up presently, but there was a gentleman in the drawing-room with her just now."

"What a bother!" exclaimed Chrissie. "Now it will be too late for me to go with you, Miss Lilly. I wish horrid, stupid gentlemen wouldn't come to call and interrupt mamma when it's her time for coming up to see Ferdy. And it's not really tea-time yet."

But tea appeared all the same. There was plainly some reason for Miss Lilly's staying later than usual. And when the reason was explained in the shape of Dr. Lilly, who put his kind old face in at the door half an hour or so later, no one welcomed him more heartily than Chrissie, though she got very red when Ferdy mischievously whispered to her to ask if she counted *him* "a horrid, stupid gentleman."

Dr. Lilly was a great favourite with the children. And never had Ferdy been more pleased to see him than to-day.

"I am so glad you've come," he said, stretching out his little hand, thinner and whiter than his old friend would have liked to see it. "Miss Lilly says you know a lot about wood-carving, and I do so want to learn to do it."

Dr. Lilly smiled.

"I am afraid my granddaughter has made you think me much cleverer than I am, my dear boy," he replied. "I can't say I know much about it myself, but I have a young friend who does, and if you really want to learn, I daresay he might be of use to you."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled, and so did Miss Lilly's, for she knew her grandfather too well to think that he would have spoken in this way to Ferdy unless he had good reason for it.

"Grandfather must have seen Mr. Ross and got his consent for the lessons," she thought.

And she looked as pleased as Ferdy himself, who was chattering away like a little magpie to Dr. Lilly about all the lovely things he would

make if he really learnt to carve — or "cut out," as he kept calling it — very nicely.

"What I'd like best of all to do is swallows," he said. "You see I've got to know the swallows over this window so well. I do believe I know each one of them sep'rately. And sometimes in the morning early — I can hear them out of my bedroom window too — I really can almost tell what they're talking about."

"Swallows are charming," said Dr. Lilly, "but to see them at their best they should be on the wing. They are rather awkward-looking birds when not flying."

"They've got *very* nice faces," said Ferdy, who did not like to allow that his friends were short of beauty in any way. "Their foreheads and necks are such a pretty browny colour, and then their top feathers are a soft sort of blue, greyey blue, which looks so nice over the white underneath. I think they're awfully pretty altogether."

"You have watched them pretty closely, I see," said Dr. Lilly, pleased at Ferdy's careful noticing of his feathered neighbours. "I love swallows as much as you do, but it takes a master hand to

carve *movement*. You may begin with something easier, and who knows what you may come to do in time."

Ferdy did not answer. He lay still, his blue eyes gazing up into the sky, from which at that moment they almost seemed to have borrowed their colour. Visions passed before his fancy of lovely things which he would have found it difficult to describe, carvings such as none but a fairy hand could fashion, of birds and flowers of beauty only to be seen in dreams — it was a delight just to think of them. And one stood out from the rest, a window like his own oriel window, but entwined with wonderful foliage, and in one corner a nest, with a bird still almost on the wing, poised on a branch hard by.

"Oh," and he all but spoke his fancy aloud, "I feel as if I could make it *so* lovely."

But just then, glancing downwards, though still out of doors, he gave a little start.

"It *is* him," he exclaimed. "Miss Lilly, dear, do look. Isn't that Jesse, standing at the gate?"

Yes, Jesse it was. Not peeping in shyly, as

some boys would have done. That was not Mr. Jesse's way. No, there he stood, in the middle of the open gateway, quite at his ease, one hand in his pocket, in the fellow of which the other would have been, no doubt, if it had not been holding an inconvenient shape of parcel—a long narrow parcel done up in a bit of newspaper, which had seen better days; not the sort of parcel you could possibly hide in a pocket. It was tea-time at the farm, and Jesse had slipped down to the Watch House in hopes of catching sight of Miss Lilly, for she had spoken of the afternoon as the best time for seeing Ferdy.

"Of course it is Jesse," said the young lady. "Look, grandfather, don't you think I may run down and ask Mrs. Ross to let me bring him in for a few minutes?"

And off she went.

A minute or two later Ferdy and Chrissie, still looking out of the window in great anxiety lest Jesse should get tired of waiting and go away before Miss Lilly could stop him, saw their governess hurry up the drive. And Jesse, as he caught sight of her, came forward, a little shy and

bashful now, as he tugged at his cap by way of a polite greeting.

Ferdy's face grew rosy with pleasure.

"They're coming in," he said to Dr. Lilly.

"Yes," said the old gentleman. "I will go over to the other side of the room with the newspaper, so that the poor lad won't feel confused by seeing so many people."

But all the same from behind the shelter of his newspaper the old gentleman kept a look-out on the little scene passing before him.

Miss Lilly came in quickly, but Jesse hung back for a moment or two at the door. He was almost dazzled at first by the bright prettiness before him. For he had never seen such a charming room before, and though he would not have understood it if it had been said to him, underneath his rough outside Jesse had one of those natures that are much and quickly alive to beauty of all kinds. And everything that love and good taste could do to make the oriel room a pleasant prison for the little invalid boy, had been done.

It was a very prettily shaped room to begin with, and the creeping plants trained round the

window outside were now almost in their full summer richness. Roses peeped in with their soft blushing faces; honeysuckle seemed climbing up by the help of its pink and scarlet fingers; clematis, the dear old "traveller's joy," was there too, though kept in proper restraint. The oriel window looked a perfect bower, for inside, on the little table by Ferdy's couch, were flowers too — one of his own moss-baskets, filled with wild hyacinth, and a beautiful large petalled begonia, one of old Ferguson's special pets, which he had been proud to send in to adorn Master Ferdy's room, and two lovely fairy-like maidenhair ferns.

And the little group in the window seemed in keeping with the flowers and plants. There was the delicate face of the little invalid, and pretty Christine with her fluffy golden hair, and Miss Lilly, slight and dark-eyed, stooping over them, as she explained to Ferdy that Jesse was longing to see him.

Altogether the poor boy, rude and rough as he was, felt as if he were gazing at some beautiful picture; he would have liked to stand there longer

— the feelings that came over him were so new and so fascinating. He did not see old Dr. Lilly behind his newspaper in the farther corner of the room — he felt as if in a dream, and he quite started when Miss Lilly, glancing round, spoke to him by name.

"Come in, Jesse," she said, "I do want Master Ferdy to see — you know what."

Jesse was clutching the little walking-stick tightly. He had almost forgotten about it. But he moved it from his right arm to his left, as he caught sight of the small white hand stretched out to clasp his own big brown one — though, after all, as hands go, the boy's were neither thick nor clumsy.

"I'm so glad you've come back, Jesse," said Ferdy in his clear, rather weak tones. "You didn't care for being away, did you? At least, not much?"

"No, Master Ferdy, 'twas terrible rough," said the boy. "I'm glad to be back again, though I'd be still gladder if Mr. Meare'd take me on reg'lar like."

"I hope he will soon," said Ferdy. "I daresay

papa wouldn't mind saying something to him about it, if it would be any good. I'll ask him. But what's that you've got wrapped up so tight, Jesse?"

Jesse reddened.

"Then the young lady didn't tell you?" he said, half turning to Miss Lilly.

"Of course not," she replied. "Don't you remember, Jesse, I said you should give it to Master Ferdy yourself?"

Jesse fumbled away at the strips of newspaper he had wound round his stick, till Ferdy's eyes, watching with keen interest, caught sight of the ears and the eyes and then the snout of the grotesque but unmistakable pig's head — "old Jerry — the biggest porker at the farm."

"Oh, Jesse," cried Ferdy, his face radiant with delight, "*how* lovely!" and though the word was not quite exactly what one would have chosen, it sounded quite perfect to Jesse — it showed him that Master Ferdy "were right down pleased."

"'Tis only a bit o' nonsense," he murmured as he stuffed the stick into the little invalid's hands. "I thought it'd make you laugh, Master Ferdy. I

took it off old Jerry — you know old Jerry — the fat old fellow as grunts so loud for his dinner."

"Of course I remember him," said Ferdy. "Don't you, Christine? We've often laughed at him when we've run in to look at the pigs. Isn't it *capital?* Do you really mean that you cut it out yourself, Jesse? Why, I'd *never* be able to cut out like that! He really looks as if he was just going to open his mouth to gobble up his dinner, doesn't he, Miss Lilly?"

"He's very good — very good indeed," she replied. And then raising her voice a little, "Grandfather," she said, "would you mind coming over here to look at Jesse's carving?"

Dr. Lilly crossed the room willingly. Truth to tell, the newspaper had not been getting very much of his attention during the last few minutes.

In his own mind he had been prepared for some little kindly exaggeration on Eva's part of Jesse's skill, so that he was really surprised when he took the stick in his own hands and examined it critically, to see the undoubted talent — to say the least — the work showed.

Rough and unfinished and entirely "untaught"

work of course it was. But that is exactly the sort of thing to judge by. It was the *spirit* of it that was so good, though I daresay you will think that a curious word to apply to the rude carving of so very "unspiritual" a subject as an old pig's head, by a peasant boy! All the same I think I am right in using the expression.

"Life-like and certainly original," murmured Dr. Lilly. "Grotesque, of course — that is all right, that is always how they begin. But we must be careful — very careful," he went on to himself in a still lower tone of voice.

And aloud he only said, as he looked up with a smile, "Very good, my boy, very good. You could not have a better amusement for your idle hours than trying to copy what you see in the world about you. It is the *seeing* that matters. You must have watched this old fellow pretty closely to understand his look, have you not?"

Jesse, half pleased, half shy, answered rather gruffly. "He do be a queer chap, to be sure. Master Ferdy, and Missie too, has often laughed at him when they've been up at the farm. And that's how I come to think of doing him on a

stick. And many a time," he went on, as if half ashamed of the childishness of the occupation, "there's naught else I can do to make the time pass, so to say."

"You could not have done better," said the old doctor kindly. "Don't think it is waste of time to try your hand at this sort of thing after your other work is done. I hope you may learn to carve much better. A little teaching would help you on a good deal, and proper tools and knowledge of the different kinds of wood."

Jesse's face expressed great interest, but then it clouded over a little.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, "but I dunnot see how I could get the teaching. There's nothing like that about here — not like in big towns, where they say there's teaching for nothing, or next to nothing — evenings at the Institutes."

"Ah well, help comes to those who help themselves. Master Ferdy may be able to give you some hints if he learns carving himself. And he can tell you some stories of the poor country boys in Switzerland and some parts of Germany — how they work away all by themselves till they learn

to make all sorts of beautiful things. Have you any other bits of carving by you that you could show me?"

Again Jesse's brown face lighted up, and Ferdy listened eagerly.

"Oh lor, yes, sir, all manner of nonsense — whistles, sir, though there's some sense in whistles, to be sure," with a twinkle of fun.

"Then bring me a pocketful of nonsense this evening — no, to-morrow evening will be better — to my house at Bollins. You know it, of course? And we'll have a look over them together. Perhaps I may have a friend with me, who knows more about carving than I do."

"And after Dr. Lilly has seen them, please bring some of them for me to see too, Jesse," said Ferdy. "When can he come again, do you think, Miss Lilly?"

Miss Lilly considered.

"On Friday afternoon. Can you get off for half an hour on Friday about this time, Jessie?"

"Oh yes, miss, no fear but I can," the boy replied.

"And thank you ever so many times — a great,

great many times, for old Jerry," said Ferdy as he stretched out his little hand in farewell.

Jessie beamed with pleasure.

"I'll see if I can't do something better for you, Master Ferdy," he said.

And to himself he added, "It's a deal sensibler, after all, than knocking up after mischief all the evening — a-shamming to smoke and a-settin' trees on fire." For this had been one of his worst misdeeds in the village not many months before, when he and some other boys had hidden their so-called "cigars" of rolled-up leaves, still smouldering, in the hollow of an old oak, and frightened everybody out of their wits in the night by the conflagration which ended the days of the poor tree and threatened to spread farther.

Still more pleased would he have been could he have overheard Ferdy's words after he had gone.

"Isn't it really capital, Dr. Lilly? I don't believe I could *ever* do anything so like *real* as this old Jerry."

CHAPTER IX

"MY PUPILS"

THAT summer was a very, very lovely one. It scarcely rained, and when it did, it was generally in the night. If it is "an ill wind that brings nobody any good," on the other hand I suppose that few winds are so good that they bring nobody any harm, so possibly in some parts of the country people *may* have suffered that year for want of water; but this was not the case at Evercombe, where there were plenty of most well-behaved springs, which — or some of which at least — had never been known to run dry.

So the little brooks danced along their way as happily as ever, enjoying the sunshine, and with no murmurs from the little fishes to sadden their pretty songs, no fears for themselves of their full bright life running short. Every living thing seemed bubbling over with content; the flowers and blossoms were as fresh in July as in May;

never had the birds been quite so busy and merry; and as for the butterflies, there was no counting their number or variety. Some new kinds *must* have come this year from butterflyland, Ferdy said to Christine one afternoon when he was lying out on his new couch on the lawn. Christine laughed, and so did Miss Lilly, and asked him to tell them where that country was, and Ferdy looked very wise and said it lay on the edge of fairyland, the fairies looked after it, that much he *did* know, and some day perhaps he would find out more.

And then he went on to tell them, in his half-joking, half-serious way, that he really thought the swallows were considering whether it was worth while to go away over the sea again next autumn. He had heard them having *such* a talk early that morning, and as far as he could make out, that was what they were saying.

"The spring came so early this year, and the summer looks as if it were going to last for always," he said. "I don't wonder at the swallows. Do you, Miss Lilly?"

Eva smiled, but shook her head.

"It is very nice of them to be considering about

it," she replied, "for, no doubt, they will be sorry to leave you and the oriel window, Ferdy — sorrier than ever before." For she understood the little boy so well, that she knew it did him no harm to join him in his harmless fancies sometimes. "But they are wiser than we are in certain ways. They can feel the first faint whiff of Jack Frost's breath long before we have begun to think of cold at all."

"Like the Fairy Fine-Ear," said Ferdy, "who could hear the grass growing. I always like to think of that — there's something so — so *neat* about it."

"What a funny word to use about a fairy thing," said Christine, laughing. "Ah, well, any way we needn't think about Jack Frost or cold or winter just yet, and a day like this makes one feel, as Ferdy says, as if the summer must last for always."

It had been a great, an unspeakable comfort to the family at the Watch House, all thinking so constantly about their dear little man, to have this lovely weather for him. It had made it possible for him to enjoy much that would otherwise

have been out of the question — above all, the being several hours of the day out of doors.

The big doctor had come again, not long after the day I told you of — the day of Miss Lilly's grandfather's visit, and of the presentation of the "old Jerry stick," as it came to be called. And he gave leave at last for Ferdy to be carried out of doors and to spend some hours on the lawn, provided they waited till a special kind of couch, or "garden-bed" in Ferdy's words, was ordered and sent from London. It was a very clever sort of couch, as it could be lifted off its stand, so to say, and used for carrying the little fellow up and down stairs without the slightest jar or jerk.

And Ferdy did not feel as if he were deserting his dear oriel window, for the nicest spot in the whole garden for the daily camping-out was on the lawn just below the swallows' home. And watching their quaint doings, their flyings out and in, their "conversations," and now and then even a tiny-bird quarrel among the youngsters, came to be a favourite amusement at the times, which must come in every such life as Ferdy had to lead, when he felt too tired to read or to

be read to, too tired for his dearly loved "cutting-out" even, clever as he was getting to be at it.

Miss Lilly's hopes were fulfilled. Ferdy was having real lessons in carving two or three times a week. Dr. Lilly had arranged all about it, with the young man he had thought of, before he went away. His going away had turned into a much longer absence than was at first expected, but out of this came one very pleasant thing — Miss Lilly was living altogether at the Watch House.

This was a most happy plan for Ferdy, and for everybody, especially so far as the carving lessons were concerned, for Mr. Brock could only come in the evening, and but for Miss Lilly's presence there might have been difficulties in the way, Mrs. Ross was so terribly afraid of overtiring Ferdy, and nervous about his straining himself or doing too much in any way.

But she knew she could trust Eva, who really seemed to have, as her grandfather said, "an old head on young shoulders." She was the first to see if Ferdy was getting too eager over his work, or tiring himself, and then too, though she had not actual artist talent herself, she had a very

quick and correct eye. She understood Mr. Brock's directions sometimes even better than Ferdy himself, and was often able to help him out of a difficulty or give him a hint to set him in a right way when he was working by himself in the day-time.

And another person was much the gainer by Miss Lilly's stay at the Watch House. I feel sure, dear children, you will quickly guess who that was.

Jesse Piggot?

Yes, poor Jesse.

But for Eva I doubt if he would have been allowed to share Ferdy's lessons. Mrs. Ross had grown nervous since that sad birthday morning, though at the time she seemed so calm and strong.

But she was now too anxious, and I am afraid Flowers was a little to blame for her mistress's fears that Jesse would in some way or other harm little Ferdy. Flowers did not like Jesse. Indeed, a good many people besides the Watch House servants had no love for the boy. It was partly Jesse's own fault, partly a case of giving a dog a bad name.

"He came of such a rough lot," they would say. "Those Draymoor folk were all a bad lot, and Piggot's set about the worst. Jesse was idle, and 'mischeevious,' and impudent," and besides all these opinions of him, which Flowers repeated to Ferdy's mother, there was always "some illness about at Draymoor — at least there was bound to be — scarlet fever or measles or something, in a place where there were such swarms of rough, ill-kept children."

This was really not the case, for Draymoor was an extraordinarily healthy place, and when Mrs. Ross spoke to Dr. Lilly before he left of her fears of infection being brought to her boy, he was able to set her mind more at rest on this point, and Eva took care to remind her from time to time of what "grandfather had said." And Jesse's luck seemed to have turned. To begin with, he was now regularly employed at the farm, and a week or two after Mrs. Ross had consented to his sharing Ferdy's lessons, the Draymoor difficulty came to an end, for Farmer Meare gave him a little room over the cow-houses, and told him he might spend his Sundays there too if he

liked, so that there was really no need for him to go backwards and forwards to the neighbourhood Ferdy's mother dreaded so, at all.

He was not overworked, for he was a very strong boy, but he had plenty to do, and there might have been some excuse for him if he had said he felt too tired "of an evening" to do anything but loiter about or go to bed before the sun did.

No fear of anything of the kind, however. Jesse was a good example of the saying that it is the busiest people who have the most time. The busier he was in the day, the more eager he seemed that nothing should keep him from making his appearance at the door of the oriel room a few minutes before the time at which the wood-carver from Whittingham was due.

And he was sure to be heartily welcomed by Ferdy and his governess, and Christine too, if she happened to be there.

The first time or two Miss Lilly had found it necessary to give him a little hint.

"Have you washed your hands, Jesse?" she said, and as Jesse looked at his long brown fingers

rather doubtfully, she opened the door again and called to good-natured Thomas, who had just brought the boy upstairs. "Jesse must wash his hands, please," she said.

And from that evening the brown hands were always quite clean. Then another hint or two got his curly black hair cropped and his boots brushed, so that it was quite a tidy-looking Jesse who sat at the table on Mr. Brock's other side, listening with all his ears and watching with all his eyes.

And he learnt with wonderful quickness. The teacher had been interested in him from the first. Old Jerry's head had shown him almost at once that the boy had unusual talent, and the next few weeks made him more and more sure of this.

"We must not let it drop," he said to Eva one day when he was able to speak to her out of hearing of the boys. "When Dr. Lilly returns I must tell him about Jesse. He must not go on working as a farm-labourer much longer. His touch is improving every day, and he will soon be able to group things better than I can do myself — much better than I could do at his

age," with a little sigh, for poor Mr. Brock was not at all conceited. He was clever enough to know pretty exactly what he could do and what he could not, and he felt that he could never rise very much higher in his art.

Miss Lilly listened with great pleasure to his opinion of Jesse, but, of course, she said any change in the boy's life was a serious matter, and must wait to be talked over by her grandfather and Mr. Ross when Dr. Lilly came home.

And in her own heart she did not feel sure that they would wish him to give up his regular work, not at any rate for a good while to come, and till it was more certain that he could make his livelihood in a different way; for what Dr. Lilly cared most about was to give pleasant and interesting employment for leisure hours — to bring some idea of beauty and gracefulness into dull home lives.

She said something of this kind one evening after Jesse had gone, and she saw by the bright look in Ferdy's face that he understood what she meant, better even than Mr. Brock himself did perhaps.

"It sounds all very nice, miss," said the wood-carver, "but I doubt if there's any good to be done in that sort of way unless when there's real talent such as I feel sure this Piggot lad has. The run of those rough folk have no idea beyond loafing about in their idle hours; and, after all, if they're pretty sober — and some few are that — what can one expect? The taste isn't in them, and if it's not there, you can't put it."

Eva hesitated.

"Are you so sure of that?" she said doubtfully.

"Well, miss, it looks like it. With Jesse now, there was no encouragement — it came out because it was there."

"Yes, but I think Jesse is an exception. He *has* unusual talent, and in a case like his I daresay it will come to his choosing a line of his own altogether. But even for those who have no talent, and to begin with, even no taste, I do think *something* might be done," she said.

"Thomas has taken to making whistles," said Ferdy, "ever since he saw Jesse's. He can't carve a bit — not prettily, I mean — but he cuts out letters rather nicely, and he's been giving every-

body presents of whistles with their — 'relitions' on."

"*Initials* you mean, dear," said Miss Lilly.

"*Initials*," repeated Ferdy, getting rather pink.

"Ah," said the wood-carver with a smile, "you can't quite take Thomas as an example, my boy. Why, compared to many of the even well-to-do people about, his whole life is 'a thing of beauty.' Look at the rooms he lives in, the gardens, the ladies he sees. And as for those Draymoor folk, they'd rather have the bar of an inn than the finest picture gallery in the world. No, miss, with all respect, you 'can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.'"

Ferdy laughed. He had never heard the quaint old saying before, and as it was time for Mr. Brock to go, no more was said.

But both Miss Lilly and Ferdy had their own thoughts and kept their own opinion.

Ferdy's own work made him very happy, and of its kind it was very nice. His little mind was full of sweet and pretty fancies, but these, of course, for such a mere child as he was, and especially as he could not sit up to do his

carving, it was very difficult to put into actual shape.

But his happy cheeriness kept him from being discouraged.

"I shall never be as clever as Jesse," he told Miss Lilly and Christine, "but I don't mind. P'r'aps when we're big I'll *think* of things for Jesse to *do*."

"You can't tell yet what you may be able to do when you're big," said his governess. "I think it is wonderful to see all you can do already. Those animals for the poor little children at the hospital are beautiful, Ferdy."

"They're *toys*," said Ferdy with some contempt, "only," more cheerfully, "I'm very glad if they'll please the poor little children. But oh, Miss Lilly dear, if I could make you see the beautiful things I *think!* The prettiest of all always comes something like the oriel window — like an oriel window in fairyland."

"Was there a window like that in the house the little fairy had to build, do you think, Miss Lilly?" asked Christine.

"No, of course not," said Ferdy, before his gov-

erness had time to answer. "My thinked window isn't built, it's cut out; it's all beautiful flowers and leaves, like the real window in summer, only far, far prettier. And there are birds' nests, with them *almost* flying, they are so light and feathery looking, and — " he stopped, and lay back with his eyes closed and a dreamy smile on his face.

"When you are older," said Miss Lilly, "I hope you will travel a good deal and go to see some of the wonderful carvings there are in Italy and Germany, and indeed in England too. Not only wood-carving, but sculpture. Fancy, *stone* worked so as to look as if a breath of air would make it quiver!"

She spoke perhaps a little thoughtlessly, and in an instant she felt that she had done so, for Ferdy opened his big blue eyes and gazed up at her with a strange wistful expression.

"Miss Lilly dear," he said, "you mustn't count on my doing anything like that — travelling, I mean, or things well people can do. P'r'aps, you know, I'll be all my life like this."

Eva turned her head aside. She did not want

either Ferdy or his sister to see that his quaint words made her feel very sad — that, indeed, they brought the tears very near her eyes.

And in a minute or two Ferdy seemed to have forgotten his own sad warning. He was laughing with Christine at the comical expression of a pigling which he had mounted on the back of a rather eccentric-looking donkey — it was his first donkey, and he had found it more difficult than old Jerrys.

That evening a pleasant and very unexpected thing happened.

It was a lesson evening, but a few minutes before the time a message was brought to the oriel room by good-natured Thomas. It was from Jesse to ask if he might come up, though he knew it was too early, as he wanted "pertickler" to see Master Ferdy before "the gentleman came."

"He may, mayn't he, Miss Lilly?" asked the little invalid.

"Oh yes," Eva replied. She was careful to please Mrs. Ross by not letting Jesse ever forget to be quite polite and respectful, and never, as he would have called it himself, "to take free-

doms," and there was a sort of natural quickness about the boy which made it easy to do this.

And somehow, even the few hours he spent at the Watch House — perhaps too the refining effect of his pretty work — had already made a great change in him. The old half-defiant, half-good-natured, reckless look had left him; he was quite as bright and merry as before, but no one now, not even Flowers, could accuse him of being "impudent."

He came in now with an eager light in his eyes, his brown face ruddier than usual; but he did not forget to stop an instant at the door while he made his usual bow or scrape — or a mixture of both.

"Good evening, Jesse," said Ferdy, holding out his hand. "Why, what have you got there?" as he caught sight of some odd-shaped packages of various sizes, done up in newspaper, which Jesse was carrying.

"Please, Master Ferdy, I've brought 'em to show you. It's my pupils as has done them. They're nothing much, I know, but still I'm a bit proud of 'em, and I wanted to show them to you and Miss here, first of all."

He hastened, with fingers almost trembling with eagerness, to unpack the queer-looking parcels, Miss Lilly, at a glance from Ferdy, coming forward to help him. Ferdy's own cheeks flushed as the first contents came to light.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I *wish* I could sit up!"

But in another moment he had forgotten his little cry of complaint, so interested was he in the curious sight before him.

All sorts and shapes of wooden objects came to view. There were pigs' heads, evidently modelled on old Jerry, dogs, and horses, and cows, some not to be mistaken, some which would, it must be confessed, have been the better for a label with "This is a —," whatever animal it was meant to be, written upon it; there were round plates with scalloped edges, some with a very simple wreath of leaves; boxes with neat little stiff designs on the lids — in fact, the funniest mixture of things you ever saw, but all with *attempt* in them — attempt, and good-will, and patience, and here and there a touch of something more — of real talent, however untrained — in them all, or almost all, signs of love of the work.

There came a moment or two of absolute silence — silence more pleasing to Jesse than any words, for as his quick eyes glanced from one to another of his three friends, he saw that it was the silence of delight and surprise.

At last said Ferdy, his words tumbling over each other in his eagerness, "Miss Lilly, Chrissie, isn't it wonderful? Do you hear what Jesse says? It's his *pupils*. He's been teaching what he's been learning. Tell us all about it, Jesse."

"Do, do," added Eva. "Yes, Ferdy, you're quite right — it's wonderful. Who are they all, Jesse?"

"There's about a dozen, altogether," began Jesse, with, for the first time, a sort of shyness. "It began with one or two at the farm; seein' me so busy of an evening, they thought it'd be better fun nor throwin' sticks into the water for the dogs to catch, or smokin' them rubbishin' sham cigars. We sat in the barn, and then one day I met Barney — Barney Coles, cousin's son to Uncle Bill at Draymoor. Barney's not a bad chap, and he's been ill and can't go in the mines. And we talked a bit, and he axed how it was

"We works in a shed there in a field by the smithy . . . and we're as jolly as sand-boys."—P. 155.

I never come their way, and I said how busy I was, and he might see for hisself. So he comed, and he's got on one of the fastest — with plain work like," and Jesse picked out one or two neat little boxes and plates, with stiff unfanciful patterns, carefully done. "He's lots of time just now, you see, and he's got a good eye for measuring. And then he brought one or two more, but I was afraid master wouldn't be best pleased at such a lot of us, so now I go two evenings a week to Bollins, close by your place, miss," with a nod, not in the least intended to be disrespectful, in Miss Lilly's direction, "and we works in a shed there, in a field by the smithy. We got leave first, that's all right, and we fixed up a plank table and some benches, and we're as jolly as sand-boys. I've often had it in my mind to tell you, but I thought I'd better wait a bit till I had somethin' to show."

"You will tell Mr. Brock about it?" said Miss Lilly. "He will be *nearly* as pleased as we are — he can't be *quite*. I don't think I have ever been more pleased in my life, Jesse."

It was "wonderful," as Ferdy had said. Jesse

Piggot, the ringleader in every sort of mischief, the "cheeky young rascal" out of one scrape into another, to have started a class for "art work" among the rough colliery boys of Draymoor!

"Oh, I do wish grandfather were back again," Eva went on. "*He* will help you, Jesse, in every way he possibly can, I know."

"We should be proud if the old doctor'd look at what we're doing," said Jesse. "And there's several things I'd like to ask about. Some of the boys don't take to the carving, but they're that quick at drawin' things to do, or fancy-like patterns that couldn't be done in wood, but'd make beautiful soft things — couldn't they be taught better? And Barney says he's heard tell of brass work. I've never seen it, but he says it's done at some of the Institutes, Whittingham way, and he'd like that better than wood work."

He stopped, half out of breath with the rush of ideas that were taking shape in his mind.

"I know what you mean," said Miss Lilly. "I have seen it. I think it is an ancient art revived again. Yes, I don't see why it would not be possible to get teaching in it. And then there's

basket work, that is another thing that can be quite done at home, and very pretty things can be made in it. It might suit some of the lads who are not much good at carving."

"Them moss baskets of Master Ferdy's are right-down pretty," said Jesse. "And you can twist withies about, beautiful."

His eyes sparkled — his ideas came much quicker than his power of putting them into words.

"There's no want of pretty things to copy," he said after a little silence.

"No indeed," said Miss Lilly.

But at that moment the door opened to admit Mr. Brock. A start of surprise came over the wood-carver as he caught sight of the table covered with Jesse's exhibition. And then it had all to be explained to him, in his turn. He was interested and pleased, but scarcely in the same way as Eva and Ferdy.

"We must look them all over," he said, "and carefully separate any work that gives signs of taste or talent. It is no use encouraging lads who have neither."

Jesse's face fell. He had somehow known that

Mr. Brock would not feel quite as his other friends did about his "pupils."

"Yes," said Miss Lilly, "it will no doubt be a good thing to classify the work to some extent. But I would not discourage *any*, Mr. Brock. Taste may grow, if not talent; and if there are only one or two boys with skill enough to do real work, surely the pleasure and interest of making *something* in their idle hours must be good for all?"

The wood-carver smiled indulgently. He thought the young lady rather fanciful, but still he could go along with her to a certain extent.

"Well, yes," he agreed. "At worst it is harmless. When the doctor returns, Miss Lilly, we must talk it all over with him; I am anxious to consult him about—" he glanced in Jesse's direction meaningly, without the boy's noticing it. For Jesse and Ferdy were eagerly picking out for their teacher's approval some of the bits of carving which their own instinct had already told them showed promise of better things.

CHAPTER X

TAKING REFUGE

It was a Saturday afternoon.

Ferdy, as he lay on his couch in the oriel window, looked out half sadly. The lawn and garden-paths below were thickly strewn with fallen leaves, for the summer was gone — the long beautiful summer which had seemed as if it were going to stay "for always." And the autumn was already old enough to make one feel that winter had started on its journey southwards from the icy lands which are its real home.

There were no swallow voices to be heard.

Oh no; the last of the little tenants of the nests overhead had said good-bye several weeks ago now. Ferdy's fancy had often followed them in their strange mysterious journey across the sea.

"I wonder," he thought, "if they really *were* rather sorry to go this year — sorrier than usual, because of me."

He took up a bit of carving that he had been working at; it was meant to be a small frame for a photograph of Chrissie, and he hoped to get it finished in time for his mother's birthday. It was very pretty, for he had made great progress in the last few months. In and out round the frame twined the foliage he had copied from the real leaves surrounding his dear window, and up in one corner was his pet idea — a swallow's head, "face," Ferdy called it, peeping out from an imaginary nest behind. This head was as yet far from completed, and he almost dreaded to work at it, so afraid was he of spoiling it. To-day he had given it a few touches which pleased him, and he took it up, half meaning to do a little more to it, but he was feeling tired, and laid it down again and went back to his own thoughts, as his blue eyes gazed up dreamily into the grey, somewhat stormy-looking autumn sky.

Some changes had come in the last few months. Dr. Lilly was at home again, so Ferdy and Christine no longer had entire possession of their dear governess, though they still saw her every day except Sunday, and sometimes even then too.

Ferdy was, on the whole, a little stronger, though less well than when able to be out for several hours together in the open air. What the doctors now thought as to the chances of his ever getting quite well, he did not know; he had left off asking. Children live much in the present, or if not quite that, in a future which is made by their own thoughts and feelings in the present. And he had grown accustomed to his life, and to putting far before him, mistily, the picture of the day when he *would* be "all right again." He had not really given up the hope of it, though his mother sometimes thought he had.

The truth was that as yet the doctors did not know and could not say.

But the present had many interests and much happiness in it for Ferdy, little as he would have been able to believe this, had he foreseen all he was to be deprived of in a moment that sad May morning.

His friendship for Jesse was one of the things he got a great deal from. Nothing as yet was settled about the boy's future, eager though Mr. Brock was to see him launched in another kind

of life. For both Mr. Ross and Dr. Lilly felt that any great step of the sort must first be well thought over, especially as Jesse was now working steadily at Farmer Meare's and earning regular wages, and seemingly quite contented. Though he had had his troubles too. Some of his old wild companions were very jealous of him and very spiteful; and bit by bit a sort of league had been started against him among the worst and roughest of the Draymoor lads, several of whom were angry at not being allowed to join the class in the shed at Bollins, some still more angry at having been sent away from the class, for Jesse and his friend Barney who acted as a sort of second in command were very particular as to whom they took as pupils. Or rather as to whom they *kept;* they did not mind letting a boy come two or three times to see "what it was like," but if he turned out idle or disturbing to the others, and with no real interest in the work, he was told in very plain terms that he need not come back.

They were patient with some rather dull and stupid lads, however. Barney especially so. For he was very "quick" himself. And some of these

dull ones really were the most satisfactory. They were so *very* proud of finding that they could, with patience and perseverance, "make" something, useful at any rate, if not highly ornamental. No one who has not been tried in this way knows the immense pleasure of the first feeling of the power to "make."

These things Ferdy was thinking of, among others, as he lay there quietly this afternoon. He was alone, except for an occasional "look in" from Thomas or Flowers, as Mr. Ross had taken his wife and Christine for a drive.

Ferdy had grown much older in the last few months in some ways. He had had so much time for thinking. And though he did not, as I have said, trouble himself much about his own future, he thought a good deal about Jesse's.

There was no doubt that Jesse was *very* clever at carving. Ferdy knew it, and saw it for himself, and Miss Lilly thought so, and the old doctor thought so; and most of them all, Mr. Brock thought so. But for some weeks past Mr. Brock's lessons had stopped. He had been sent away by the firm at Whittingham who employed him, to

see to the restoration of an old house in the country, where the wood carving, though much out of repair, was very fine, and required a careful and skilful workman to superintend its repair.

So there seemed to be no one at hand quite as eager about Jesse as Ferdy himself.

"The winter is coming fast," thought the little invalid, "and they can't go on working in the shed. And Jesse may get into idle ways again — he's not learning anything new now. It fidgets me so. I'd like him to be sent to some place where he'd get on fast. I don't believe he cares about it himself half as much as I care about it for him. And he's so taken up with his 'pupils.' I wonder what could be done about getting some one to teach them. Barney isn't clever enough. Oh, if only mamma wouldn't be so afraid of my tiring myself, and would let me have a class for them up here in the winter evenings! Or I might have two classes, — there are only ten or twelve of them altogether, — and once a week or so Mr. Brock might come to help me, or not even as often as that. If he came once a fortnight or even once a month he could see how they were getting on,

— *extra* coming, I mean, besides his teaching me, for of course the more I learn the better I can teach them. And another evening we might have a class for something else — baskets or something not so hard as carving. Miss Lilly's learning baskets, I know. And then Jesse wouldn't mind leaving his pupils. Oh, I do wish it could be settled. I wish I could talk about it again to Dr. Lilly. I don't think Jesse's quite am— I can't remember the word — caring enough about getting on to be something great."

Poor Jesse, it was not exactly want of ambition with him. It was simply that the idea of becoming anything more than a farm-labourer had never yet entered his brain. He thought himself very lucky indeed to be where he now was, and to have the chance of improving in his dearly loved "carving" without being mocked at or interfered with, neither of which so far had actually been the case, though there had been some unpleasant threatenings in the air of late. His efforts to interest and improve the boys of the neighbourhood had been looked upon with suspicion — with more suspicion than he had known till quite lately, when he and Barney

had been trying to get some one to lend them a barn or an empty room of any kind for the winter.

"What was he after now? Some mischief, you might be sure, or he wouldn't be Jesse Piggot."

So much easier is it to gain "a bad name," than to live one down.

"Oh," thought little Ferdy, "I do *wish* something could be settled about Jesse."

He was growing restless — restless and nervous, which did not often happen. Was it the gloomy afternoon, or the being so long alone, or what? The clouds overhead were growing steely-blue, rather than grey. Could it be going to thunder? Surely it was too cold for that. Perhaps there was a storm of some other kind coming on — heavy rain or wind, perhaps.

And mamma and Chrissie would get *so* wet! If only they would come in! Ferdy began to feel what he very rarely did — rather sorry for himself. It was nervousness, one of the troubles which are the hardest to bear in a life such as Ferdy's had become and might continue. But this he was too young to understand; he thought he was cross and discontented, and this self-reproach only

made him the more uncomfortable. These feelings, however, were not allowed to go very far that afternoon. A sound reached Ferdy's quick ears which made him look up sharply and glance out of the window. Some one was running rapidly along the drive towards the house.

It was Jesse.

But fast as he came, his way of moving told of fatigue. He had run far, and seemed nearly spent.

Ferdy's heart began to beat quickly, something must be the matter. Could it be an accident? Oh! if anything had happened to his father and mother and Chrissie, and Jesse had been sent for help! But in that case he would have gone straight to the stable-yard, and as this thought struck him, Ferdy breathed more freely again. Perhaps, after all, it was only some message and nothing wrong, and Jesse had been running fast just for his own amusement.

The little boy lay still and listened. In a minute or two he heard footsteps coming upstairs. Then a slight tap at the door — Thomas's tap — and almost without waiting for an answer, the footman came in.

"It's Jesse, Master Ferdy," he began. "Jesse

Piggot. He's run all the way from Bollins, and he's pretty well done. He's begging to see you. He's in some trouble, but he won't tell me what. I'm afraid your mamma won't be best pleased if I let him up, but I don't know what to do, he seems in such a state."

Ferdy raised himself a little on his couch. There must be something very much the matter for Jesse, merry, light-hearted Jesse, to be in a "state" at all.

"Let him come up at once, Thomas, I'll put it all right with mamma," he began, but before Thomas had time for any more hesitation the matter was taken out of his hands by Jesse's short-cropped, dark head appearing in the doorway.

"Oh, Master Ferdy!" he exclaimed, in a choking voice, "mayn't I come in?"

"Of course," said Ferdy quickly. "It's all right, Thomas," with a touch of impatience, "I'll call you if I want you," and Thomas discreetly withdrew, closing the door behind him.

"They're after me, Master Ferdy," were Jesse's first words, "at least I'm afraid they are, though I tried my best to dodge them."

"Who?" exclaimed Ferdy.

"The p'lice and Bill Turner's father, and a lot of them, and oh, Master Ferdy, some one called out he was killed!"

"Who?" said Ferdy again, though his own cheeks grew white at Jesse's words. "And what is it that's happened, and what do you want me to do. You must tell me properly, Jesse."

It said a good deal for Ferdy's self-control that he was able to speak so quietly and sensibly, for he was feeling terribly startled. Jesse choked down his gasping breath, which was very nearly turning into sobs.

"I didn't want to frighten you, Master Ferdy. I didn't ought to, I know, but I couldn't think what else to do. It's that Bill Turner, Master Ferdy," and at the name he gave a little shudder. "He was in the class once, but it was only out of mischief. He did no good and tried to upset the others. So Barney and I wouldn't keep him at no price, and he's gone on getting nastier and nastier, and the other day he 'called' me — he did — so that I couldn't stand it, and I went for him. It didn't hurt him, but it made him

madder than ever, and he said he'd pay me out. And this afternoon when Barney and me were sorting the carvings at the shed — we've a box we keep them all in, there — Bill comes down upon us, him and some others. They got hold of 'em all and smashed 'em up and kicked them to pieces — all to pieces, Master Ferdy" — with a sort of wail, almost of despair, in his voice. "All the things we've been at for so long! We were going to make a show of them at Christmas; and I couldn't stand it, I went at him like a wild beast — it was for the other lads I minded so — though he's much bigger nor me, and I got him down, and he lay there without moving, and some one called out he was dead, and then the p'lice came, and one of 'em caught hold of me, but I got loose and I started running — I scarce knew what I was doing. I just thought I'd get here, and you'd tell me what to do. He can't be dead, Master Ferdy," he went on, dropping his voice — "you don't think he can be? I didn't seem to know what it meant till I got here and began to think."

"I don't know," said Ferdy, again growing very

pale, while poor Jesse's face was all blotched in great patches of red and white, and smeared with the tears he had tried to rub off. "Oh, I do wish papa and mamma would come in! I don't know what to do. Do you think they saw you running this way, Jesse?"

"I — I don't know, Master Ferdy. I hope not, but there was a lot of the boys about — Draymoor boys, I mean — Bill's lot, and they may have tracked me. Of course none of *my* boys," he added, lifting his head proudly, "would peach on me, whatever the p'lice did."

But even as he spoke, there came, faintly and confusedly, the sound of approaching steps along the road just beyond the hedge, and a murmur of several voices all talking together. It might not have caught Ferdy's attention at any other time, but just now both his ears and Jesse's were sharpened by anxiety.

"They're a coming, Master Ferdy," exclaimed the poor boy, growing still whiter.

"Never mind," said Ferdy, trying hard to be brave, "Thomas is all right, he won't let them come up here."

"Oh, but maybe he can't stop them," said Jesse. "The p'lice can force their way anywheres. I wouldn't mind so much if it *had* to be — like if your papa was here and said I must go to prison. But if they take me off now with no one to speak up for me, seems to me as if I'd never get out again."

Poor Ferdy was even more ignorant than Jesse of everything to do with law and prisons and the like; he looked about him almost wildly.

"Jesse," he said in a whisper. "I know what to do. Creep under my couch and lie there quite still. Thomas is all right, and nobody else saw you come up, did they?"

"No one else saw me at all," Jesse replied, dropping his voice, and going down on his hands and knees, "better luck. I'll keep still, no fear, Master Ferdy," his boyish spirits already rising again at the idea of "doing the p'lice," "and they'd never dare look under your sofa."

He scrambled in, but put his head out again for a moment to whisper in an awestruck tone, "But oh, Master Ferdy, if they do come up here, please try to find out if Bill Turner's so badly

hurt as they said. I know it *can't* be true that I did as bad as *that*."

All the same he was terribly frightened and remorseful. Ferdy scarcely dared to reply, for by this time a group of men and boys was coming up the drive, and a constable in front marched along as if he meant business, for as Ferdy watched them, he turned round and waved back the eight or ten stragglers who were following him, though he still held by the arm a thin, pale-faced little fellow whom he had brought with him all the way. This was Barney, poor Jesse's first lieutenant.

Another minute or two passed. Then hurrying steps on the stairs again, and Thomas reappeared, looking very excited.

"Master Ferdy," he exclaimed, but stopped short on seeing that his little master was alone. "Bless me!" he ejaculated under his breath, "he's gone! and I never saw him leave the house."

"What is it, Thomas?" said Ferdy, trying to speak and look as usual. "I saw the constable come in — you must tell him papa's out."

"I have told him so, sir, and I'm very sorry, but

he will have it he must see you. Some one's been and told that Jesse ran this way."

"Let him come up then," said Ferdy, with dignity, "though I'm sure papa will be very angry, and I don't believe he's any right to force his way in! But I'm not afraid of him!" proudly.

"Master *will* be angry for certain," said Thomas, "very angry, and I've told the constable so. But he's in a temper, and a very nasty one, and won't listen to reason. He says them Draymoor boys are getting past bearing. I only hope," he went on, speaking more to himself, as he turned to leave the room again, "I only hope he won't get me into a scrape too for letting him up to frighten Master Ferdy — not that he *is* frightened all the same!"

CHAPTER XI

UNDER THE SOFA

Two minutes later the burly form of Constable Brownrigg appeared at the door. He was already, to tell the truth, cooling down a little and beginning to feel rather ashamed of himself; and when his eyes lighted on the tiny figure in the window —looking even smaller and more fragile than Ferdy really was — the clumsy but far from bad-hearted man could at first find nothing to say for himself. Then —

"I beg pardon, sir, I hope I haven't upset you, but dooty's dooty!"

Ferdy raised his head a little, and looked the constable straight in the face, without condescending to notice the half apology.

"What is it you want of me?" he said coldly.

"It's all along of that there Jesse Piggot," replied Brownrigg, "as bad a lot as ever were!"

"What's he been doing?" said Ferdy again in the same tone, rather turning the tables upon the constable, as if he — Brownrigg — and not Ferdy himself, was the one to be cross-questioned.

The man glanced round him half suspiciously.

"He was seen coming here, sir."

"Well, suppose he *had* come here, you can't take him up for that?" said the boy. "I'm asking you what harm he'd done."

"He got up a row at Bollins this afternoon, and half killed a poor lad — Bill Turner by name — threw him down and half stunned him."

"Half stunned him," repeated Ferdy, "that's not quite the same as half killing him. Have you sent him to the hospital?"

"Well no, sir," said the constable, "he come to again — them boys has nine lives more than cats. I don't suppose he's really much the worse. But these Draymoor fights must be put a stop to, they're getting worse and worse; I've had orders to that effect," drawing himself up.

"And has Jesse Piggot been mixed up with them lately?" said Ferdy severely.

Again the constable looked rather small.

"Well no, sir," he repeated, "but what does that matter, if he's been the offender to-day."

This was true enough.

"But what do you want *me* to do?" asked Ferdy.

"To detain the lad if he comes here and give him up to the lawful authorities," said Brownrigg more fluently. "Everybody knows you've been very kind to him, but it's no true kindness to screen him from the punishment he deserves."

A new idea struck Ferdy.

"Did he begin the fight then?" he said. "There's such a thing as — as defending oneself, quite rightly. Supposing the other boy started it?"

"That will be all gone into in the proper time and place," said Brownrigg pompously. "An example must be made, and — "

Before he had time to finish his sentence Ferdy interrupted him joyfully. He had just caught sight of the pony-carriage driving in rapidly. For some garbled account of what had happened had been given to Mr. Ross by the group of men and boys still hanging about the gates, and he hurried in, afraid of finding his boy startled and upset.

Nor did the sight of the stout constable reassure him. On the contrary it made Mr. Ross very indignant. He scarcely noticed Brownrigg's half-apologetic greeting.

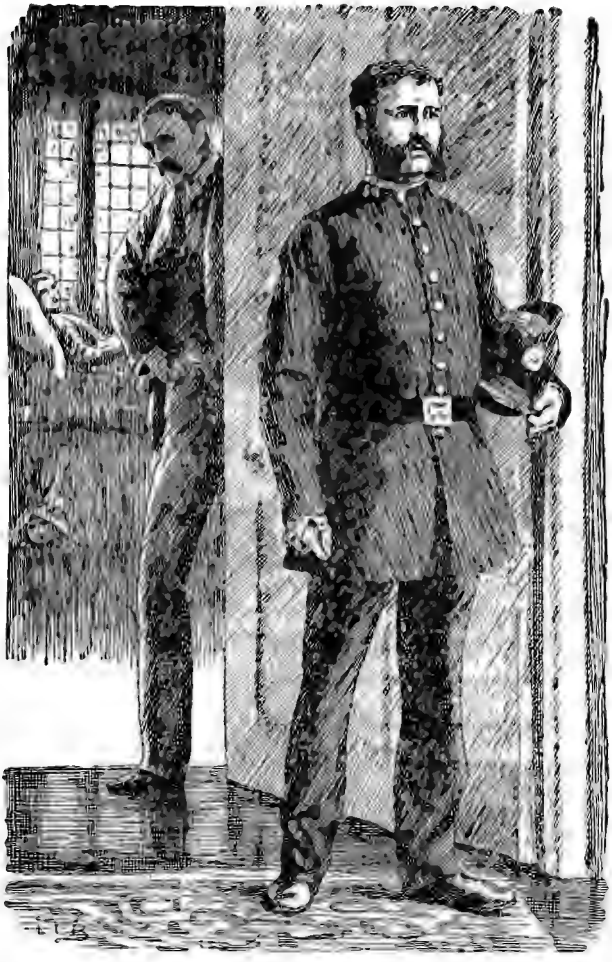
"What's all this?" he said sharply. "Who gave you leave to come up here and disturb an invalid?"

Brownrigg grew very red, and murmured something about his "dooty."

"You've exceeded it in this case, I think you'll find," the master of the house replied severely. "Step downstairs if you please, and then I'll hear what you've got to say," and to Ferdy's inexpressible relief, for the consciousness of Jesse's near presence was beginning to make him terribly nervous.

Mr. Ross held the door wide open and the constable shamefacedly left the room. Scarcely had he done so when there came a subterranean whisper, "Master Ferdy," it said, "shall I come out?"

"No, no," Ferdy replied quickly. "Stay where you are, Jesse, unless you're choking. Mamma will be coming in most likely. Wait till papa comes back again, and I can tell him all about it."



"STEP DOWNSTAIRS, IF YOU PLEASE AND THEN I'LL HEAR WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY."—P. 178.

Rather to Ferdy's surprise, the answer was a sort of giggle.

"I'm all right, thank you, Master Ferdy — as jolly as a sand-boy. And you did speak up to the old bobby, Master Ferdy; you did set him down. But I'm right down glad Bill Turner's none the worse, I am. It give me a turn when they called out I'd done for him."

And Ferdy understood then that the giggle came in part from relief of mind.

"Hush now, Jesse," he said. "I want to watch for Brownrigg's going. And till he's clear away, you'd best not come out, nor speak."

There was not very long to wait. For though Mr. Ross spoke out his mind very plainly to the constable, he made short work of it, and within ten minutes of the man leaving the oriel room, Ferdy had the pleasure, as he announced to Jesse in a sort of stage whisper, of seeing the worthy Mr. Brownrigg walking down the drive, some degrees less pompously than on his arrival. Nor was he now accompanied by poor little Barney, whom Mr. Ross had kept back, struck by pity for the lad's white, frightened face, as the con-

stable could not say that there was any "charge" against *him*, except that he had been an eye-witness of the "row."

"It's all right now, Jesse," Ferdy added in a minute or two. "He's quite gone — old Brownrigg, I mean — so you'd better come out."

Jesse emerged from his hiding-place, a good deal redder in the face than when he went in, though he was still trembling inwardly at the idea of meeting Ferdy's father.

"You don't think, Master Ferdy — " he was beginning, when the door opened and both Mr. and Mrs. Ross came in.

"Ferdy, darling," exclaimed his mother, "you've not been really frightened, I hope — " but she stopped short, startled by an exclamation from her husband.

"Jesse!" he said. "You here after all! Upon my word!" And for a moment he looked as if he were really angry. Then the absurd side of the matter struck him, and it was with some difficulty that he suppressed a smile.

"My dear boy," he went on, glancing at the tiny, but determined-looking figure on the couch, "you'll

be having your poor old father pulled up for conniving at felony."

"I don't know what that is, papa," said Ferdy. "But if it means hiding Jesse under the sofa — yes, I *did* do it, and I'd do it again. It wasn't Jesse thought of it, only he was afraid that if Brownrigg took him away he'd be put in prison and have nobody to speak up for him, and perhaps have been kept there for ever and ever so long."

"Your opinion of the law of the land is not a very high one apparently, Jesse," said Mr. Ross, eying the boy gravely.

Jesse shuffled and grew very red.

"I'll do whatever you think right, sir," he said stoutly. "If I must give myself up to Brownrigg, I'll run after him now. I don't want to get Master Ferdy nor you into any bother about me, after — after all you've done for me," and for the first time the boy broke down, turning his face away to hide the tears which he tried to rub off with the cuff of his sleeve.

"Oh, papa," said Ferdy pleadingly, his ov— eyes growing suspiciously dewy, "mamma, mamn look at him."

Up to that moment, to tell the truth, Mrs. Ross's feelings towards Jesse had not been very cordial. The sight of him had startled her and made her almost as indignant with him as with the constable. But now her kind heart was touched. She glanced at her husband, but what she saw already in his face set her mind at rest.

"Come, come," said Mr. Ross, "don't put yourself out about it, Ferdy. Tell me the whole story quietly, or let Jesse do so," and after swallowing one or two sobs, Jesse found voice to do as he was desired. He told his tale simply and without exaggeration, though his voice shook and quivered when he came to the sad part of the destruction of the many weeks' labour of himself and his "pupils," and Mrs. Ross could not keep back a little cry of indignation.

"It is certainly not *Jesse* who deserves punishment," she said eagerly, turning to her husband.

"If he could have controlled himself," said Mr. Ross, "to the point of *not* knocking down that bully, Turner, his case would have been a still stronger one. Do you see that, my boy?" he

went on, turning to Jesse, who murmured something indistinctly in reply.

"I'm glad he did knock him down all the same, papa," said Ferdy. "You don't now think Jesse need give himself up to the p'lice?" he added anxiously.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Ross, "but it will be best for me to see Brownrigg and tell him all I now know — except — no I don't think I will tell him of the hiding-place under your sofa, Ferdy." Then turning again to Jesse, "To-morrow is Sunday," he said; "do you generally go to see your friends at Draymoor on a Sunday?"

"Sometimes," said Jesse; "not always, sir."

"Then they won't think anything of it if they don't see you to-morrow?"

"Oh lor, no," Jesse replied. "They'd think nothing of it if they never saw me again. It's only Barney that cares for me or me for him of all that lot."

"Oh yes, by the bye — Barney!" said Mr. Ross, starting up. "I left him downstairs, poor little fellow. He is in my study — you know where that is, Jesse, run and fetch him," and Jesse,

delighted at this proof of confidence, started off quite cheerfully on his errand.

When he was out of hearing, Mr. Ross said thoughtfully, "It won't do for that lad to remain in this neighbourhood, I see. I must have a talk about him again with Dr. Lilly, and probably with Brock. Something must be decided as to his future, and if he really has talent above the average he must be put in the right way towards making it of use."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled; sorry as he would be to be parted from Jesse, this was what he, as well as Miss Lilly, had long been hoping for. Before he had time to say anything, a tap at the door told that the two boys were outside.

"Come in," said Mr. Ross, and then Jesse reappeared, half leading, half pushing his small cousin before him.

Mrs. Ross was touched by Barney's white face and general air of delicacy.

"Don't look so scared," she heard Jesse whisper to him.

"You must be tired, Barney," she said kindly. "Jesse and you must have some tea before you go back to Draymoor."

"Jesse's not to go back to Draymoor, mamma," said Ferdy, looking up quickly.

"No," said Mr. Ross, "that is what I wish to speak to Barney about. Will you tell your father, Barney — is it to your father's house that Jesse goes on Sundays generally?"

"No, sir, please, sir, I haven't a father — mother and me's alone. It's my uncle's."

"Well, then, tell your uncle from me," continued Mr. Ross, "that I think it best to keep Jesse here at present, and that he was not to blame for the affair this afternoon. I shall see the constable again about it myself."

Barney's face expressed mingled relief and disappointment.

"Yes, sir," he said obediently. "There'll be no more classes then, I suppose?" he added sadly. "Is Jesse not even to come as far as Bollins?"

"Not at present," replied Mr. Ross, and then, feeling sorry for the little fellow, he added: "If your mother can spare you, you may come over here to-morrow and have your Sunday dinner with your cousin in the servants' hall."

Both boys' faces shone with pleasure.

"And will you tell the lads, Barney," said Jesse, "how it's all been. And what I minded most was their things being spoilt."

Barney's face grew melancholy again.

"Don't look so downhearted," said Mr. Ross. "We won't forget you and the other boys. Your work has already done you great credit."

Ferdy's lips opened as if he were about to speak, but the little fellow had learnt great thoughtfulness of late, and he wisely decided that what he had to say had better be kept till he was alone with his parents.

Just then Christine made her appearance, very eager to know more about the constable's visit and the exciting events of the afternoon. So Mrs. Ross left her with her brother while she herself took the two boys downstairs to put them into the housekeeper's charge for tea, of which both struck her as decidedly in need.

"Papa," said Ferdy, when he had finished going over the whole story again for his sister's benefit, "don't you think if Jesse has to go away that *I* might take on the class, one or two evenings a week any way? Mr. Brock might come sometimes —

extra, you know — just to see how they were getting on. And they would be quite safe here, and nobody would dare to spoil their things."

"And Miss Lilly and I would help," said Christine eagerly. "There are some of them, Jesse has told us, that want to learn other things — not only wood-carving — that *we* could help them with. Miss Lilly's been having lessons herself in basket-making."

"Dr. Lilly has reason to be proud of his granddaughter," said Mr. Ross warmly. "We must talk it all over. It would certainly seem a terrible pity for the poor fellows to lose what they have gained, not merely in skill, but the good habit of putting to use some of their leisure hours — miners have so much idle time."

"There's the big empty room downstairs near the servants' hall," said Ferdy. "Could not I be carried down there, papa?"

Mr. Ross hesitated. He felt doubtful, but anxious not to disappoint the boy, for as his eyes rested on the fragile little figure and he realised what Ferdy's future life might be, he could not but think to himself how happy and healthy a

thing it was that his child should be so ready to interest himself in others, instead of becoming self-engrossed and discontented.

"We must see what Mr. Stern says," he replied, "and — yes, it will soon be time for the other doctor's visit. It would be a long walk from Draymoor for the lads."

"*They* wouldn't mind," said Ferdy decisively.

"And now and then," said Christine, "we might give them tea for a treat — once a month or so. Oh! it would be lovely!"

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER BIRTHDAY

AGAIN a spring morning, only two or three years ago. Evercombe and the Watch House look much as they did when we first saw them; one could fancy that but a few months instead of ten years had passed since then. The swallows are there, established in their summer quarters above the oriel window, the same and yet not the same, though their chirping voices may, for all we know, be telling of the little boy who for so long lay on his couch below, and loved them so well.

He is not there now, nor is his couch in its old place. Instead of the small white face and eager blue eyes, there stands at the post of observation a tall young girl, a very pretty girl, with a bright flush of happy expectancy on her fair face.

"Mamma, mamma," she exclaims to some one farther in the shade of the room. "I think I hear wheels. Surely it will be they this time!

If it isn't I really shan't have patience to stand here any longer."

But "this time" her hopes were fulfilled. Another moment and a carriage, which Christine, for Christine of course it was, quickly recognised as their own, turned in at the lodge gates. And before those inside had time to look up at the window, Chrissie had flown downstairs followed by her mother.

"Ferdy, Ferdy," she exclaimed, as the carriage-door opened, and her brother, his face flushed with pleasure equal to her own, got out, slowly, and with a little help from his father, for the young man was slightly lame, though his face told of health and fair strength. He was sunburnt and manly looking, full of life and happy eagerness.

"Isn't he looking well, mamma?" said Chrissie, when the first loving greetings had sobered down a little.

"And haven't I grown?" added Ferdy, drawing himself up for approval. "And isn't it delightful that I managed to get back on my birthday after all?"

"Yes, indeed, my darling," said Mrs. Ross; while

his father gently placed his hand on the young fellow's shoulder, repeated her words — "yes, indeed! When we think of this day — how many years ago! Ten? — yes, it must be ten — you were nine then, Ferdy, how very, unutterably thankful we should be to have you as you are."

"And to judge by my looks you don't know the best of me," said Ferdy. "I can walk ever so far without knocking up. But oh! what heaps of things we have to talk about!"

"Come in to breakfast first," said his mother. "It is ten o'clock, and after travelling all night you must be a little tired."

"I am really not, only very hungry," said Ferdy, as he followed her into the dining-room, where the happy party seated themselves round the table.

Ferdy had been away, abroad, for nearly two years, both for study and for health's sake, and the result was more than satisfactory. School-life had been impossible for him, for the effect of his accident had been but very slowly outgrown. Slowly but surely, however, for now at nineteen, except for his slight lameness, he was perfectly well, and able to look forward to a busy and useful life, though the

exact profession he was now to prepare himself for, was not yet quite decided upon. A busy and useful and happy life it promised to be, with abundance of interests for his leisure hours. He was no genius, but the tastes which he had had special opportunity for cultivating through his boyhood, were not likely to fail him as he grew up. And in many a dull and sunless home would they help him to bring something to cheer the dreary sameness of hard-working lives. They had done so already, more than he as yet knew.

Breakfast over and his old haunts revisited, Mrs. Ross at last persuaded him and his sister to join her on the lawn, where she had established herself with her work for the rest of the morning.

"This is to be a real holiday, Ferdy," she said. "Chrissie and I have been looking forward to it for so long. We have nothing to do but to talk and listen."

"I have heaps to tell," said Ferdy, "but even more to ask. My life in Switzerland was really awfully jolly in every way, but I'll tell you all about it by degrees; besides, I did write long letters, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," said his mother and Chrissie together; "you have been very good about letters all the time."

"Of course," began Ferdy, after a moment or two's silence, "the thing I want to hear most about is how the classes have all been getting on. You kept me pretty well posted up about them, but in your last letters there was some allusion I didn't quite understand — something that the Mayhews have been trying to arrange."

Christine glanced at her mother.

"I may tell him, mayn't I, mamma? Now that it is all settled? It is not only the Mayhews' doing, but Jesse Piggot's too." And as Ferdy's face lightened up at the mention of his friend's name — "He hasn't told you about it himself, surely?" in a tone of some disappointment. "I know that he wrote you long letters regularly, but I thought he understood that we wanted to keep this new thing as a surprise for you when you came back."

Ferdy looked puzzled.

"He hasn't told me anything special except about himself. The last big piece of news, since of course it was all settled about his getting that capital berth

at Whittingham, that Brock was so delighted about — the last big piece of news was his getting the order for the carved reredos at Cowlingsbury Abbey. But that was some time ago!"

"Oh yes," said Christine, "we have got over the excitement about that. Though when you think of it," she went on thoughtfully, "it is wonderful to realise how Jesse has got on."

"And is going to get on," added Mrs. Ross. "And without flattery, Ferdy dear, we may say that it is greatly, very greatly owing to you."

Ferdy's face grew red with pleasure.

"I can't quite see that," he said. "Genius must make its own way. But do tell me the *new* news, Chrissie."

"It is that Mr. Mayhew has got ground and money and everything for a sort of, — we don't know what to call it yet — 'Institute' is such an ugly word, we must think of something prettier, — a sort of art college at Draymoor for the afternoon and evening classes. It won't be on a large scale. It would spoil it if it were, and a great part of their work can still be done at home, which is of course the real idea of it

all. But this little college will really be for teaching what, up to now, has had to be done in odd rooms here and there."

"Oh!" Ferdy exclaimed, "that is splendid!"

"For you see," Chrissie continued, counting up on her pretty fingers as she spoke, "what a lot of different kinds of work we've got to now. Wood-carving to begin with — we must always count it first!"

"No," said Ferdy, laughing, "strictly speaking, moss baskets came first."

"Wood-carving," repeated Chrissie, not condescending to notice the interruption. "Then the modelling, and pottery classes, basket work, brass hammering, and the iron work, not to speak of the girls' embroidery and lace work. Yes," with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "it *is* time for a little college of our own."

"A great, great deal of it," said Ferdy, "is owing to Miss Lilly — I always forget to call her Mrs. Mayhew. If only she hadn't gone and got married we might have called it the 'Lily College,' after her."

"If she hadn't gone and got married, as you

elegantly express it, Mr. Mayhew would never, probably, have been the vicar of Draymoor," said Chrissie. "For it was through his being such a great friend of Dr. Lilly's that he got to know the old squire, who gave him the living. And just think of all he has done — Mr. Mayhew I mean — for Draymoor."

Ferdy did not at once reply. He gazed up into the blue sky and listened to the sweet bird-chatter overhead, with a look of great content on his face.

"Yes," he said, "things do turn out so — quite rightly sometimes. Just when you'd have thought they'd go wrong! There was that row of Jesse's to begin with, when he thought all he had tried to do was spoilt, and then there were all the difficulties about the evening classes, while I was still ill, and it almost seemed as if we would have to give them up. And then — and then — why! when it was fixed for me to go away two years ago, I could scarcely believe they'd go on, even though Mr. Mayhew had come by that time. Yes, it's rather wonderful! I say, Chrissie," with a sudden change of tone, "doesn't it really sound

as if the swallows were rather excited about my coming home!"

Christine looked up at the oriel window with a smile.

"I wonder," she said, "if *possibly* any of them can be the same ones, or if they are telling over the story that has been handed down from their great-grandparents — the story of the little white boy that used to lie on the couch in the window?"

. . . . .

This is not a completed story, dear children, as you will have seen. It is only the story of the beginning of a life, and of the beginning of a work, which in many and many a place, besides gloomy Draymoor, started in the humblest and smallest way. If ever, or wherever any of you come across this endeavour to brighten and refine dull, ungraceful, and ungracious homes, you will do your best to help it on, I feel sure, will you not?

THE END

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